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Japanese Literature after Sartre:
Noma Hiroshi, Ōe Kenzaburō, and Mishima Yukio

by
Douglas Neil Slaymaker

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

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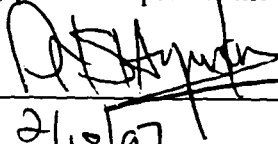
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Doug Slaymaker

Doctoral Dissertation

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University of Washington

Abstract

Japanese Literature after Sartre:
Noma Hiroshi, Ōe Kenzaburō, and Mishima Yukio

by Doug Slaymaker

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This dissertation is an exploration of postwar Japanese literature written in the wake of Sartre's fiction as it was introduced in Japan. I focus on the work of Noma Hiroshi, Ōe Kenzaburō, and Mishima Yukio. The postwar years were a time when these writers in particular, and much Japanese fiction in general, actively engaged existentialist issues. I want to detail the encounter of these writers with existentialism because the understanding of existentialism in Japan reflects certain significant "native" responses and concerns to the work of Jean-Paul Sartre, the existentialist writer most consistently invoked in the years after the war. This study is, then, a literary study pursuing the themes from Sartre's fiction that was emphasized in those years in Japan.

Sartre was first encountered in Japan as a writer of fiction, and a writer of erotic literature at that. He was grouped with those interested in *nikutai bungaku*, the literature of the body. Japanese writers were drawn to him because he seemed to highlight and provide solutions to issues of concern to them. In particular, his concerns correlated to the issues of the body and the role of that body *vis-à-vis* other bodies, responsibility, and action. The war had thrown all of these issues into sharp relief.

I have chosen to focus on Noma, Ōe, and Mishima because these writers represent the interaction of three different generations of writers with the existentialist issues of the body and of the Self and Other. Tracing this interaction yields, in this dissertation, an intellectual history, of sorts, of the postwar years, while an application of this reading strategy enriches our understandings of the fiction.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Existentialism and Japan's Postwar

In this dissertation I will discuss fiction of Noma Hiroshi (1915-1991), Ōe Kenzaburō (1935-), and Mishima Yukio (1925-1970). I will focus on fiction of the late 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s: in all cases this is fiction from the early years of each writer's career. This is a time when these writers in particular, and much Japanese fiction in general, actively engaged existentialist issues.¹ I want to detail the encounter of these writers with existentialism because the understanding of existentialism in Japan reflects certain significant "native" responses and concerns to the work of Jean-Paul Sartre, the existentialist writer most consistently invoked in the years after the

¹"Existentialism", capitalized, will be reserved in this study to refer to the work and thought of Jean-Paul Sartre. Thus "existentialism" (small "e") is used to refer to the concerns commonly grouped together under this heading, i.e. issues of freedom, responsibility, *angst*, individuality, etc. I will discuss details of terminology below. Stated another way, given the special sense in which I am discussing existentialism, it would not be inappropriate for the reader to treat every instance of existentialism as though it were enclosed in quotation marks, to set it off from a strictly philosophical usage.

war. I state it in this manner because these writers take up existentialism not as a philosophical system (as one finds in *Being and Nothingness*, for example) but as a nexus of concerns associated with Sartre's writing. These responses and concerns I will take up, to be precise although arbitrarily limiting, are issues of the body and the discourse² on Self and Other.³

²By invoking "discourse," a word I will use in relation to understandings of the body as well as Sartre's thought, I intend a discussion of the sort offered by Martin Jay who describes discourse as, "a corpus of more or less loosely interwoven arguments, metaphors, assertions, and prejudices that cohere more associatively than logically in the strict sense of the term" (16).

Concerning what I am calling a "discourse on the body", Susan Suleiman also provides a helpful preface when she writes that

The cultural significance of the female body is not only (not even first and foremost) that of a flesh-and-blood entity, but that of a *symbolic construct*. Everything we know about the body--certainly as regards the past, and even, it could be argued, as regards the present--exists for us in some form of discourse: and discourse, whether verbal or visual, fictive or historical or speculative, is never unmediated, never free of interpretation, never innocent. (2)

I will be discussing one manifestation of just such a discourse, the construct of the body as it was found in postwar Japan.

³There are of course many other existentialist issues that could be explored in detail: individual responsibility, issues of anguish and despair, for example. For this study I am limiting myself to the two above-mentioned for reasons that shall subsequently be made clear.

It seems relevant to briefly outline, at the outset, why I have chosen to discuss existentialism in this way. This study is a literary discussion, not the philosophical discussion I originally anticipated it would become. When I first entered into this project many years ago it was by a reference in an article (the precise reference now lost, if ever recorded) to Noma Hiroshi as Japan's "first Existentialist writer." My interest was piqued because I have long been personally attracted to the thinking of Existentialism and the attempts to explain human existence in a particular situation. Existentialism's concerns for the workings of action, freedom, and responsibility have long been issues I have returned to. Further, I have always been intrigued and nostalgic for a time when one could feel "committed" in the manner reflected in existentialist writing. Relatedly, I have long been taken by the sense of urgency that writers and artists shared in the postwar years, an urgency that often focused on Jean-Paul Sartre's work. Sartre's issues of action, freedom, and responsibility were, in turn, issues highlighted by the Second World War. It was then my original intent to explore these philosophical issues, as philosophical issues within a particular system, as they are found in the work of postwar writers.

This dissertation is written from the perspective of a student of Japanese literature. My interest in philosophy is deep, and while I have read widely in the philosophical issues, my background is not such that I could sustain a truly philosophical inquiry in this study. More to the point, and this is the main reason this dissertation is no longer a philosophical one, is that my readings of the literature and the work of the postwar years in Japan reveals that that fiction, while often making reference to Sartre and existentialism, prove to not be philosophical at all. In my readings of this fiction I constantly became aware that while Sartre is often invoked by these writers, the immediate referent is to his short fiction and not the philosophical treatises. Having said that, this study is decidedly *not* interested in comparing

Japanese existentialism to its original European manifestation to find where the Japanese version went astray and is mistaken. The postwar writers did not have access to Sartre's philosophical work in the postwar years: most took the short fiction available to be the equivalent of existentialism. Thus, the Japanese fiction under consideration here is in a problematic relationship with the philosophy of Sartre even while contained under its rubric, self-consciously or not. This results in an existentialism of a different sort than is usually discussed in the Western tradition: nonetheless, I am not arguing that it is a deficient misguided understanding of existentialism. I find in this a compelling and supportable, if unorthodox in the Western tradition, interaction with Sartre's writing. The details of this Japanese interaction are explored on the following pages.

These writers are reflecting themes in their writings that appear "existentialist" (this is true in particular for Noma Hiroshi) or that intentionally take up Sartrean ideas (Ôe), but in all cases the discussion is in the realm of literature, or intellectual history perhaps, but not, technically speaking, as philosophy. These writers talk about existentialism in a peculiar way, the result of their particular postwar *milieu*. Recreating the *milieu* that prompted this understanding of existentialism is a goal of this study.

This exploration of existentialism will yield a picture of how the discourse was understood in postwar Japan. The scope of this project has shifted, then, from its original conception as a re-creation of philosophical systems to an attempt at re-creating the intellectual discussions that took place in the years following World War II. In a sense then, I could characterize this as an intellectual history, an attempt to elucidate the response by Japanese intellectuals to Sartre's fiction--in contrast to his philosophy, although in the Japanese context this was taken to be the same thing.

This “native” response varies in important ways from the conception of existentialism in Europe, especially, and the U.S.⁴

What marks this first interaction with existentialism in Japan was the initial reading of Sartre’s fiction (the philosophic work being unavailable) and thus of Existentialism in this context, as an erotic literature of the body. In particular, the writers under discussion here share an existentialist sensibility, an aura that contrasts with philosophical systems. In the immediate postwar years that “existentialist sensibility” was primarily a concern for the body, the physical, the carnal. For this reason I will not be discussing existentialism as a philosophy or as a coherent system of thought that is worked out in these writers. Their initial interaction with Sartre’s work is primarily as literature, and again, these writers draw much from his work at this thematic level, where Sartre’s work is read as being concerned with issues of the body. Stated another way, the existentialism being discussed by these writers is not an orthodox philosophical system. I am interested in the influence on the work of these writers of a discourse of great importance after the war, a discourse known as existentialism. As I will show, this sense of existentialism means issues of the body and concern for a Self in relation to the Other. Plotting that reception and exploring the reasons for this reading is the force motivating this study. Issues of physicality were very much on the minds of postwar Japanese writers and thinkers and Sartre was first received as being a participant in that discussion. Plotting this understanding and

⁴ For further discussion of the history of this reception in Europe, see Stuart Hughes’ *The Obstructed Path*, especially pages 153-226 where he situates the reception of Sartre’s work against the backdrop of the War and, in particular, the Resistance, which “ranked along with the Dreyfus Case and the First World War as the third great spiritual revolution which the French had traversed in half a century” (153).

also the development of existentialism as a literature of the body will then yield an important understanding of this period in Japan's literary and intellectual history. Recreating this *milieu* is a primary motivation for this discussion.

This differing formulation of existentialism in Japan has important ramifications for the writers who engaged existentialist issues in their writings. I will be documenting the insistence and pervasiveness of these issues centering on the physical while exploring possible explanations for that development in the pages below. To that end, I will discuss existentialism not as a philosophical concept so much as a nexus of concerns that are insistent in postwar Japanese literature. For my purposes, these are 1) the discourse on the body and 2) the discourse of Self and Other.⁵ Further, this discussion is important, to borrow from J. Victor Koschmann on a different, but related topic, "not only as a strategic point of entry into postwar Japanese thought, but also as a historical reference point for ongoing discussions" (*Revolution and Subjectivity in Postwar Japan* 1).

One quickly finds that it is impossible to define an orthodox existentialism in any event, as Walter Kaufman makes eminently clear:

⁵This is important because Sartre represents the fulcrum on which a number of postwar contemporary intellectual debates were balanced. His influence extends across many boundaries. Ebisaka Takeshi discusses at length Sartre's contributions to the discussion of Marxism in a recent (1995) *Bungei* article, commenting how the fates of both, in Japan especially, are intertwined. Suzuki Michihiko discusses Sartre's relevance for the "politics versus literature" debates (here under the rubric of *engagement*) in a special 1963 edition of *Bungaku* devoted to Sartre's fiction. Sartre's relevance to the general discussions of the individual in society will be touched on below.

“Existentialism” is not merely a label that happens to have been applied to the philosophies of several men: it represents an attempt to call attention to the fact that they have something in common. To list affinities and get involved in the crisscross of family resemblances--these two share this feature, and one of them shares that trait with those two--would serve little purpose. Let us be bold and suggest a fundamental conviction common to all: philosophy should begin neither with axioms nor with doctrines, neither with ideas nor with sense impressions, but with experiences that involve the whole individual (“The Reception of Existentialism in the United States” 76).

The writers being discussed here also fall under an umbrella that can be called existentialism, “representing the fact that they have something in common.” The commonality in the postwar Japanese context centers on issues of physicality and the body, but it is also begins “with experiences that involve the whole individual.”

I focus on the writers that I do--Noma Hiroshi, Ōe Kenzaburō, and Mishima Yukio--because these writers represent the interaction of three different generations of writers with the existentialist issues of the body and of the Self and Other. These three writers all lived through Japan’s postwar period. They then share this common experience while representing the beginning (Noma), middle (Mishima), and end (Ōe) of the postwar experience.⁶ I have chosen works from the early years of each

⁶They all lived through the war itself although the nature of their wartime experience is quite varied, not least because of their differing ages. This is a point of contention for, as Nakamura Mitsuo has problematized, (in “Senryōka no bungaku”) what has been discussed as “postwar” literature was often set during or before the war. This is as true for Noma’s *Kurai e* (*Dark Pictures*, 1946) as it is for the fiction of Sartre, where

writer's careers for these provide works that best exemplify the pervasiveness of this discourse. I want to further suggest that these three writers share more in common than has been often noted.⁷ Thus while much has already been written about both Ōe and Mishima in particular, the pairing that I propose here has not been explored. The discourse on existentialism that I am explaining ties these writers together in ways that are not immediately obvious, but prove fruitful, I believe, in a new reading of these works.

Of these three, Mishima Yukio is arguably the Japanese writer best known outside of Japan. His novels have held steady appeal among non-Japanese readers.⁸ The sensational quality of his work and life has contributed to that appeal (Wagenaar

prewar and wartime experiences are articulated in work that either is, chronologically, or in feel, postwar.

⁷Susan Napier's book-length study discusses the commonality of themes found in Mishima Yukio and Ōe Kenzaburō. Subtitled "Romanticism and Realism in the Fiction of Mishima Yukio and Ōe Kenzaburō" she documents the many common themes and concerns shared by these two writers, revealing a similarity of projects in these two writers so often antagonistic and competitive. John Nathan noted in a recent address how Ōe has always felt a keen competition with Mishima, which continues even now, thirty years after his death. There is something that draws these two together, as different as they appear. As Napier makes clear, there is a surprising commonality in these two writers who seem to inhabit two extremes of a spectrum.

⁸This is a point often reiterated, usually with a touch of national pride, as in the oft-displayed page from the Swedish newspaper from 1963 where Mishima is listed among contemporary "Literary Greats" such as Hemingway, Steinbeck, and Updike. See the reproduction in page is reproduced in Isoda Koichi's *Mishima Yukio* page 73.

43). As Donald Keene notes: “The sensational death of Mishima Yukio on November 25, 1970 brought his name to the attention of countless people all over the world who had never previously been interested in Japanese literature” (1: 1167). Ōe Kenzaburō won the Nobel Prize in 1994 but the attendant promise of fame has eluded him, in the U.S., at least.⁹ “It is now hardly arguable that Ōe Kenzaburō, born in 1935, is the most important writer to emerge in postwar Japan,” claims Hosea Hirata (“Masturbation” 93). That he is important is beyond dispute; it is harder to say, now, that he is widely read or taken seriously.¹⁰ Ōe remains a writer who appeals to scholars and critics while the general readership for his work seems to have declined steadily since his most popular days in the 1960s. Noma Hiroshi, meanwhile, has hardly been translated in the West¹¹ and is largely unknown among the popular readership in Japan. His work is, however, perhaps equally important to professional writers and critics as that of Ōe or Mishima. Literary histories and recollections regularly assert his preeminence (Honda, *Monogatari sengo bungakushi* 1:51-79:

⁹The Nobel Prize for literature often becomes part of any conversation concerning this group of writers. Mishima “was avid for the Nobel Prize,” remarks John Nathan (*Mishima* xi). Gwenn Boardman Petersen writes that Mishima “managed to share with [Tanizaki and Kawabata] the honor of Nobel Prize nomination (1965)” (202). Kawabata Yasunari, who received the Prize in 1968, seems less well-known among the general U.S. readership, Nobel Prize notwithstanding.

¹⁰“These days, Ōe’s leftist political engagement is, for most Japanese who bother to pay attention, a quaint relic of the fifties and sixties” (Remnick 43).

¹¹An English translation (itself a translation from French) of Noma’s 1952 novel *Shinkū chitai* was published in 1956 as *Zone of Emptiness*. “Kao no naka no akai tsuki” (1947) has been translated by Kinya Tsuruta as “A Red Moon in Her Face”.

Nishikawa 230-267). He is, for example, widely credited with having discovered and introduced the literary idiom now associated with "postwar writing" by his style and choice of subject. Donald Keene echoes the literary opinion when he writes, "Noma Hiroshi is often treated as the emblematic postwar writer" (1: 974). This is certainly true: we find in his work the crucial concerns of the day. The panoramic quality of many of his novels captures not just the moment, but the era, in which he worked (Tsuge, "Nichijō to hinichijō no hazama" 5). He received much initial notice because of a convoluted and difficult prose style. He was throughout his life a prolific essayist, cultural and literary critic, and social activist. His writing casts a long shadow over the literature to follow for his prose and his concerns provided many with the impetus to write by helping a whole generation of writers find their voices in a tumultuous and barren time.

Noma Hiroshi becomes interested in the philosophy of Sartre later in life, but focuses on Marxism and political involvement on one hand, and the proper forum for literature that such commitments produce on the other. Ōe Kenzaburō's existentialism is evident throughout his work, but not explicit as an articulated philosophical system. Mishima Yukio would never have considered himself an existentialist; we will see just how great a role existentialist ideas play in his work nonetheless. Hence I will continually invoke phrases like "existentialist sensibility", for existentialism plays a great role in this literature, but none of these men interact with Sartre's philosophy as philosophy, but as a key or a tool to understanding and elucidating something else. Existentialism represents for these writers a conglomerate of ideas and outlooks, a paradigm around which to organize understandings of life, a filter through which to quantify experience. That filter, that paradigm, has great ramifications for their fiction because of the themes subsequently worked out there.

Noma Hiroshi reflects this existentialist sensibility by his themes and style: his work is similar in many ways to the early fiction of Sartre that was appearing in Japan in the late 1940s simultaneous with Noma's literary debut. Noma's early fiction reads much like Sartre's early fiction, yet it was written independent of Sartrean influence. For Noma's generation, while the name of Sartre was known, his work was not available in Japan. Ōe encountered Sartre as a student at Tokyo University late in the 1950s. His initial interaction can thus be cast as more "sophisticated" meaning that Ōe was able to read more widely in Sartre's work because the work was now available. There was a public discussion of Sartre's work, now widely available, when Ōe encountered it. Ōe met Sartre in Paris in 1961 and again in Tokyo in 1966.¹² This is quite different from Noma's encounter a decade earlier, as Tsuge Teruhiko suggests when he writes: "When one discusses the latter half of the 1950s and the 1960s there appeared writers who launched into their individual brand of literature based on their own study of Sartre's Existentialism. The writers representative of this group are Ōe Kenzaburō and Kurahashi Yumiko" ("Jitsuzonshugi" 143-144). That is, this later generation of writers had access to texts and discussions that Noma did not have in the years following the war. Their reading of those texts stimulated their literary imaginations and set a particular course for their work, one that is clearly influenced by that Existentialist encounter. That influence extended to many in the postwar years, thus in the words of Kanaseki Hisao, "The literature and philosophy [of Existentialism] exerted great influence on writers as important as Ōe Kenzaburō and in a sense had the power to change the very nature of Japanese literature" ("Yonjō", 13).

¹²The March 1962 issue of *Sekai* carries a description of Sartre by Ōe and also an interview by Tanaka Ryo. Both articles were later translated and appeared, in abridged form, in *Orient/West*.

Mishima Yukio is included here as the exception that proves the rule. While Noma and Ōe's interest in existentialism is deliberate and protracted, Mishima would never have considered himself an existentialist. What few words he had for Sartre are disparaging.¹³ I include him here because the two discourses that I will associate with existentialism in postwar Japan—that of the body and that concerning Self and Other—are themes so pervasive that they are evident even in the work of writers such as Mishima who profess to be opposed to or at least uninterested in existentialism's ideas. Existentialism establishes a discourse that Mishima addresses in his work. I will read his work through the existentialist agenda that I identify in postwar literature. This existentialist reading is to show how powerful were Sartre's ideas in these years.

Thus, while there are many other writers who come to mind in a discussion of "existentialism" in Japan,¹⁴ I will focus on Noma, Ōe, and Mishima because they are

¹³ For example, when debating with the radical students at Tokyo university (*Zenkyōtō*) in 1969 Mishima blurted out: "As it says in Sartre—who I can't stand—in *Being and Nothingness* he writes that a bound-up woman's body (*nikutai*) is the most obscene thing that there is. Now Sartre has done much in his analysis of the relationship between Self and Other but Eroticism can only be stimulated by the Other." (*Tōron* 20-21). This proves a very interesting discussion as he goes on to posit that the radical student's relationship to their adversaries is essentially an erotic one.

¹⁴ Tsuge Teruhiko's comprehensive discussion includes not only Noma and Ōe, but writers such as Shiina Rinzō, Haniya Yutaka, Abe Kōbō, Takeda Taijun, Hotta Yoshie, and Kurahashi Yumiko, among others. I will refer often to Tsuge's work; it is important not for being definitive, but for being the most protracted discussion to date of existentialism in postwar Japan as a literary phenomenon. His essay is introductory

representative of different generations in the postwar years and also because these three writers of divergent sensibilities and concerns each take up, although in quite differing ways, the Sartrean discourse as it was received in Japan. Because each highlights different points in that discourse, they thereby underscore the pervasiveness and appeal of that discourse across the literary spectrum. That these very different writers can all represent existentialism is partly a function of categories and definition. That is, I will not discuss these writers as “Sartrean” *per se* nor, strictly speaking, will I read them *vis-à-vis* the philosophic system that Sartre established. Rather, I will read them through a discourse that appeared in connection with Sartre’s ideas, colored by the manifestation of that discourse in Japan which concentrated on particular ideas expressed in his writing, and often his fiction rather than his philosophical writings. Also, because my focus will be limited to the postwar years I will only touch on these issues as they relate to the literary and intellectual history of concepts of the body and Other in Japan. I am cognizant of the larger historical picture--the development of an existentialist vocabulary in France, for example, or the influence of existentialism such as that in Kierkegaard and Dostoevsky and its history in Japan--and intend only to bracket it, not ignore it, in order to focus on the particular interaction with a particular set of ideas in the postwar years.

and it is recent; i.e. he represents the first of what I expect to be a continuing exploration in Japanese of the discourse I am identifying here. See also the Spring 1995 edition of *Bungei* which devotes a special section to “Saint Sartre and *Fin de Siècle* Existentialism” that contains a “Chart for Beginners” that, somewhat tongue-in-cheek, schematizes the relation of Japanese writers to various existentialist movements (310-311).

Existentialism (again, of a certain type) exerted great influence on the intellectual and artistic communities of postwar Japan. When existentialist thought and the fiction of Sartre became available in Japan it was assimilated through a set of issues--the discourse on the body, in particular--that cast its concerns in a different manner than in France, for example. Thus, this discussion of the reception of existentialism in Japan will also provide a partial portrait of Japanese intellectual issues revealed in writings of the postwar period, and will also highlight some of the predominant concerns and societal issues of postwar intellectuals.

Existentialism as an Idea

Existentialism, more than as a philosophy in any technical sense, struck Japanese intellectuals and artists after the war as a mood or an attitude, a sensibility or an aura. At its first reception it was taken as a literature of the body, as fiction that focused on the physical and carnal. It was associated with Sartre's fiction and not with his philosophy. It presented a paradigm that helped make sense of the war and the postwar experience. The sensibility found in Sartre's fiction resonated with their own experiences and is reflected in their writings. For the purposes of this study that sensibility includes a concern for the body and issues of Self and Other, but "sensibility" is not divorced from the myriad responses so often tied to existentialism, whether of despair, absurdity, or loneliness. As such, defining existentialism in a satisfactory manner presents a serious difficulty, as articulated by no less astute a critic than Walter Kaufman:

Most of the living "Existentialists" have repudiated this label, and a bewildered outsider might well conclude that the only thing they have in common is a marked aversion for each other. To add to the confusion, many writers of the past have frequently been hailed as members of this movement, and it is

extremely doubtful whether they would have appreciated the company to which they are consigned. (*Existentialism From Dostoevsky to Sartre* 11)

“Existentialism” resists simple definition not least of all because many of the philosophers and writers most commonly associated with it--Jean-Paul Sartre, Albert Camus, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Simone De Beauvoir, for example¹⁵--did not use the term in reference to themselves and were more likely to highlight the differences than the similarities among the “members” of the “existentialist school.” We find that, “Ostensibly Sartre did not think of himself as an existentialist until Gabriel Marcel and other French journalists, toward the end of the second World War, conferred the epithet upon him” (Kern 84). Or even more pointedly, as recorded by one of Sartre’s biographers:

“Existentialism? I don’t know what that is. My philosophy is a philosophy of existence,” [Sartre] had declared two months earlier during a symposium in Brussels. But in October 1945, overwhelmed by both the press and the very public that had appropriated the term, Sartre himself used it, giving in to what, by then, had clearly become a new fad. (Cohen-Solal 253)

That is, “existentialism” is an extremely fluid term. It has referred at times to a specific school of philosophy, to philosophers and writers at least tangentially related, while at other times has been applied to writers and thinkers who refuse the appellation entirely and, as Kaufman suggests, would have rejected the affiliation were they alive to do so. Shortly after the term was introduced, we are reminded, it was “honorably or critically applied to almost every philosopher or *littérateur* who had anything to say

¹⁵For discussion of each of these, and others, that could be included, see Robert C. Solomon’s philosophical outline, *From Rationalism to Existentialism*, esp. pp. 245-248.

about the individual, and in France, naturally, that included almost everybody” extending even to any politician who championed a “cause” (Solomon 245). Thus,

Any attempt to define existentialism within strictly philosophical lines inevitably leads to frustration. Coined and promulgated by Gabriel Marcel and other French journalists during and after World War II, the term came to smack of sensationalism and was popularly employed to designate a philosophy of despair--even if much existentialist writing would belie this assumption. For these reasons and others more specifically philosophical, most writers and philosophers labeled existentialist have declined to accept the epithet. (Kern 1)

Kern discusses existentialism and fictional technique. In so doing she is required, in the end, to focus on certain writers, Kierkegaard, Sartre, and Beckett. This seems the only way around the "frustration" she identifies; it is a strategy I too will adopt for there is no succinct, satisfactory answer to the query, "What exactly makes for Existentialist literature?" If one begins listing qualities: a sense of loneliness, a sense of loss, of being alone before or without God, perhaps of *angst*, one has created nothing more than a list of qualities always present in literature. Anxiety and loneliness are not limited to the twentieth-century but have been part of the human experience through the ages. Nor are they limited to the postwar, nor even to "existentialism". One may argue that they are unique, or new, in degree or focus, but not in any essential way. Any attempt to define the term by such emotional appeals is not sufficient; bibliographies of existentialist literature routinely take one back to Dostoevsky and Pascal, Montaigne or further: the writings of Augustine or the Old Testament book of Ecclesiastes, for example, are not beyond this purview. In Japan one can profitably look to Buddhist writings as, for example, Kotoh Tetsuaki does when he quotes from the *Hi-zō Hōyaku* of Kukai, "It is dark at the very beginning of one's birth and it is still dark at the very end" before discussing the

“linguisticity of human experience” in his comparison of the existentialist philosophy of Heidegger and Buddhism (202). Morimoto Kazuo has devoted an entire book to a comparison of Dōgen and Sartre, linking similarities in the conception of time and the individual self. One can likewise recall the loneliness and desolation not uncommon in the *Tsurezuregusa* or the *Hōjōki* with their preoccupations with impermanence.

Which is to say only that feelings of *angst* and despair, loneliness and disillusion, are an integral and ancient part of the human condition. Such feelings have comprised the experience of many people at various times throughout human history. A discussion based on such feelings is not sufficient to define a novelistic practice. Thus, in Walter Kaufman’s words,

Existentialism is not a philosophy but a label for several widely different revolts against traditional philosophy. . . . Certainly, Existentialism is not a school of thought nor reducible to a set of tenets. . . . Existentialism is a timeless sensibility that can be discerned here and there in the past; but it is only in recent times that it has hardened into a sustained protest and preoccupation. (*Existentialism From Dostoevsky to Sartre* 11-12)

Kaufman writes here of philosophical Existentialism in reference to the major philosophical movement of the mid-twentieth century. Existentialism, in this sense, is a loose confederation in which one is forced to discuss certain philosopher/writers, Sartre or Camus, for example, and their individual formulations of issues. This is not, however, the “existentialism” that concerns me. My interests are literary, not philosophical. That is, I am more interested in existentialism as a “timeless sensibility” than as a “set of tenets”, an “aura” in contrast to a “philosophical system.” Even so, it is with a debt to Walter Kaufman that I have employed words such as “sensibility” and “aura” in this discussion of existentialism in order to emphasize the emotive or psychological aspects incorporated in existentialism--loneliness, *angst*,

etc.--in contrast to philosophical tenets. I want to explore how the sentiments displayed in the writings of the most existentialist of writers--Jean-Paul Sartre--inspired a generation, and more, of writers in postwar Japan. That he inspired many is without question; just how his energy and affinity are displayed in the fiction of this time, and just why his concerns were taken to be “their” concerns in Japan, is the question of interest to me. For these reasons I will focus on the writings of Jean-Paul Sartre.

When Robert Solomon begins his discussion by writing “the fashionable epithet ‘existentialism’ is inextricably coupled with a group of French philosophers whose personal as well as philosophical intimacy grew from a deep involvement in the social-political turmoil of war-torn Europe in the 1940s” (245), he gets close to what ties together the three writers in this dissertation. Noma, Ōe, and Mishima also share “a deep involvement in the social-political turmoil of a war-torn” country. Discussions of existentialism and the literature reflecting existentialism’s concerns of these and other Japanese writers are not set exclusively in the postwar, they are often set in the prewar and war years, then read through the hindsight of the war experience. The prewar and wartime Japanese experience looks decidedly existentialist in the light of the postwar. The existential framework provided a way to order the wartime experience. Existentialism’s ability to provide a framework through which writers could express the wartime experiences is another of its appeals to the postwar generations of writers.

The Idea of a Postwar

In Japan, where the divisions among prewar, wartime, and postwar play such important roles in public memory, it is important to note some of the controversy that surrounds the very use of the term postwar. We find that “postwar” (*senjo*) is a term

no more stable than “existentialism.” The historical delineation “postwar” is problematic, especially when plotting the history of literature. The beginning of the postwar period is without great issue, for any literature appearing after the surrender of August 15, 1945 is generally considered to be “postwar”.¹⁶ However, positing an end to the “postwar period” and with it “postwar literature” is particularly contentious and has been variously and animatedly debated since the early 1950s. No consensus has been reached and it continues as the subject of much debate in Japan. It is also instructive to remember that “postwar” had first been used to mark the important societal changes following the Russo-Japanese war of 1904-1905. Prior to the Pacific war, this is what “postwar” referred to, and in 1946 this “postwar” was still within living memory.¹⁷

Further, most of the writers considered to be “postwar” were in fact active before the war. Thus the works of Sartre (and Camus) that exerted such postwar influence, especially in Japan, are chronologically prewar in conception and execution. They are not directly influenced by the Second World War. Likewise, even though many of the Japanese writers now associated with existentialism could have read the works of Sartre and Camus in French, they probably didn't: “Thus, it was entirely by chance that these writers were writing fiction with existentialist inclinations” writes

¹⁶For example, Noma Hiroshi's *Kurai e* is always discussed as “postwar literature”—it appeared in 1946—even though it was written during the war and is set in the late 1930s (Noma, “Jibun no sakuhiin” 256). This holds true for most of the writers discussed in this and the following chapter, Sartre and Camus, as well as Tamura Taijiro and Sakaguchi Ango.

¹⁷See, for example, Oka Yoshitake's “Generational Conflict After the Russo-Japanese War” for an elaboration of this.

Shirai Kōji, one of Sartre's earliest translators, making the same point ("Jitsuzonshugi ni tsuite" 229). Tamura Taijirō and Sakaguchi Ango were both established writers before the war. Noma Hiroshi first published after the war but clearly conceived and was writing *Kurai e* during the war.¹⁸ (Noma Hiroshi, I will argue below, is thus a prototypical existentialist,¹⁹ writing work of an existentialist nature before existentialist texts were accessible in Japan.)

Nakamura Mitsuo has argued, for example, that "postwar" could theoretically refer to anything written before the outbreak of another war and therefore preferred the term "literature under the occupation" ("Senryōka no bungaku") and limited "postwar" to only include writing which appeared between August 15, 1945 and April 1952, when the U.S. occupation came to an end with the implementation of the San Francisco peace treaty (101). Watanabe Kazutami is even stricter, limiting "postwar" to the five years between the end of World War II and the beginning of the Korean War (95). Sasaki Kiichi, meanwhile, published a famous article in *Gunzō* (1952) declaring "postwar literature" an "illusion" (*gensō*) thereby discrediting the entire discussion. Okubo Tsuneo is less extreme and restates a position he finds implicit in Nakamura's critique (of Honda Shugo's history) that "postwar" literature is bigger than the literature of the postwar "group" (*sengoha bungaku*) ("Sengo" 236). Donald Keene

¹⁸*Kurai e*, set in the late thirties is, in the Japanese context, "during the war" for Japan was already engaged in combat on the continent.

¹⁹Shiina Rinzō vies for this distinction. His awareness of Sartre is evidenced in his publication record for he hurried publication of *Shin'ya no shuen* (*A Midnight Banquet*) in 1947 out of concern that he would seem to be copying Sartre whose translations were about to appear (Usui, *Kawazu no uta* 208-209); see also Ishizaki Hitoshi's article "Jitsuzon to hōkai kankaku" esp. 120-123.

makes a helpful delineation by noting that style, more than any actual span of years, is the characteristic that binds the works usually referred to as “postwar” into a coherent whole. He has “postwar” refer to authors of left-wing leanings writing in a deliberately complicated style about alienated individuals living through a time of startling and confusing changes (1: 964). Kuno Osamu and Tsurumi Shunsuke write in their discussion of postwar existentialism that they will follow the practice of Ara Masahito and limit the “postwar” to the years 1945-1950 claiming that the “postwar” following the Korean conflict is significantly different. They restate this time scheme in a manner consistent with the Japanese penchant for generational delineations by noting that the “postwar group” will include “anyone between 12 and 26 years of age in 1945, the last year of the war” (190). Such precision is not necessary for my project. The writers under discussion here share similar wartime and postwar experiences; the existentialist concerns that stem from these experiences are evidenced in their fiction. Thus “postwar” serves as a general historical delineation and is applied to all the writers under discussion here.

In the literary context, Nishikawa Nagao builds on the four characteristics that Honda Shūgo has identified in “postwar fiction”: First, there is a very strong sense of the connection to and relationship between politics and literature in literary production. This relates to the second characteristic, an inclination towards existentialism because the influence of Sartre’s thinking and role as a public intellectual was so strong.²⁰

²⁰For a discussion of Sartre as a public intellectual in the European context, see the work by Mark Poster who writes, “In other words, Sartre views himself as an independent intellectual who has aligned himself with the people and who struggles with the oppressed wherever that struggle leads” (10-11). This conscious alignment with the people on Sartre’s part accorded him powerful appeal in Japan.

This is again, to invoke another lexicon, issues of *engagement*.²¹ The third characteristic he identifies will also get significant treatment below as it relates to the fictional enterprise. He identifies in the postwar years a significant desire to surpass the traditional realism as represented by the *watakushishōsetsu*, itself made a representative genre in Japan. The fourth characteristic that is borne out by the writers under discussion here is the expansion of topics taken to be appropriate for fictional representation, namely the various issues of politics, foreign countries, sex, the military, and the emperor (Nishikawa 11). These are not clearly delineated tendencies in my mind but I concur with Nishikawa's suggestion that existentialism plays an important role in all of these aspects. The work and role of Sartre provided models at each of these junctures.

As these discussions underscore, the divisions between prewar and postwar are not as problem-free as they may initially appear. In particular, there is an

²¹Simone de Beauvoir plays an important role here in the dissemination of Sartre's ideas, discussing *engagement* as the "writer's total presence in what he has written." Commitment in this sense is translated into Sartre's charge that both Flaubert and Goncourt were responsible for the repression that followed the fall of the Paris Commune because they wrote not a single word to prevent it. In this portrayal, again with important overlap with Japanese intellectuals, is the sense of existentialism's intellectual commitment and public role. As Jennings also notes, the immediate postwar years were to be years of the *compagnon de route* and of intellectual commitment *parexcellence* (Jennings 18). (*Compagnon de route* is a phrase of postwar vintage used to refer to those who associated closely with the communists without actually becoming communist themselves.)

important sense in which the ideas gaining focus in the postwar are not divorced from concerns that are historically “prewar.” As significant a break as the end of the war is in many realms, it is incorrect to cast it as completely divorced from earlier concerns and contexts. Many prewar issues continue to be articulated in this postwar discourse. Thus, issues of the self in society, responsibility and action are rooted in prewar Proletarian concerns and even in the *watakushishōsetsu* genre as intimated in Nishikawa’s schema. The point to be made here is that the existentialist discourse reinvigorated many of these discussions and directed them down new paths. Also, the import and nuance of the term *nikutai* strongly suggests that a fundamental category of thinking had changed. These are the issues being explored here.

Kuno Osamu and Tsurumi Shunsuke are perhaps the most extreme in the way they tie the postwar experience to the prewar. They posit in their influential *Gendai Nihon no shisō* that the reversal of values concomitant with the surrender made existentialism an experience common to all Japanese in the postwar years. This is straightforward enough, but they subsequently equate the *angst* and anguish of the prewar *tenkō* experience--the mass movements of the 1930s, especially, when intellectuals renounced their Marxism in the face of police pressure and interrogation--with the reversal of values at the end of the war to argue that these also constitute a *tenkō* experience for the populace at large.²² Since in this description all Japanese are

²²They also go on to state that “At the root of postwar existentialism is the atomic bomb experience” because of the society-wide anguish (*hisan*) it wrought (209). The parameters of existentialism as they establish them are too imprecise for my purposes, however suggestive. Hasumi Shigehiko also calls this paradigm into question; see especially “Ryō daisenkan no hito, Sarutoru” 277. The *tenko* experience as a fundamental and defining experience of an entire generation gets developed further in

tenkōsha, and since *tenkō* is a prototypical existentialist experience. Kuno and Tsurumi go on to state that all Japanese are thereby existentialists. This seems, from my perspective, to be overstated. Nonetheless, they are correct in noting that postwar issues are not divorced from the concerns of prewar society; the disillusion engendered by the surrender is in a lineage with the disillusion that accompanied the mass arrests and *tenkō* of the 1930s.²³ What this establishes, and what will prove to be a dominant theme in the discourse of the postwar years, is that this *angst* and disillusionment develop in relation to the State, the police state and its apparatuses, which is itself firmly rooted in prewar society.²⁴ The oppressive State that rounded up suspected subversives and forced Communists to recant in the 1930s is the same government that dealt out a heavy-handed ideology during the 1940s. The postwar emphasis on the individual physical body is a response and backlash against this State, against the ideology of the State that so oppressed its intellectuals.

This is important to this discussion, for Existentialism--corresponding here to Sartre's fiction--joined the dialectic of individual and State (articulated as *nikutai-kokutai*) at this juncture. Thus, as Tsuge Teruhiko writes, "Of the [postwar] writers who made an issue of existentialism, there are, first, those who described the postwar

Tsurumi's later work, particularly in *An Intellectual History of Wartime Japan, 1931-1945*, especially chapter 2. See as well the work of Patricia Steinhoff.

²³For more discussion of this period, see Donald Keene, especially pp. 846-848.

²⁴Carol Gluck provides examples and further discussion of this lineage; see her essay, "The Past in the Present" for an illuminating exposition of the period from "the realm of national history and public memory" (65).

situation in terms of the body [*nikutai*, with *shintai* provided as synonym²⁵] Oda Sakunosuke, Sakaguchi Ango, and Tamura Taijirō” (“Jitsuzonshugi” 132). That is, postwar Japanese fiction was very concerned with the body and its carnality, with issues of physicality. In particular is the connection that Tsuge here establishes between writers interested in existentialism and the concern for the individual body, the *nikutai*, that is evidenced in their work. As such, writers in Japan felt they had found a comrade engaged in a common project when they first read Sartre.

The great interest in these issues in the postwar years led Maruyama Masao, for one, to doubt there is any need for a term such as *nikutai bungaku* at all, for issues of physicality were so pervasive in the late 1940s that all contemporary literature could be labeled “carnal”²⁶ (“From Carnal Literature to Carnal Politics” 246). Maruyama clearly considers it a negative trend in literature and not at all representative, noting that while “people often argue that the state of postwar sex life itself is characterized by irresponsibility and that literature is only reflecting a real situation. Of course this might be true if we were considering only one segment of present-day society” but not

²⁵This gloss of *shintai* to highlight the meaning of *nikutai* is not uncommon. That they are distinct is one of my points. That *nikutai* gains new currency in everyday speech is also one of my points and the need to provide a gloss for it supports this argument. *Nikutai* corresponds to “physical body,” as does *shintai*. *Nikutai* gained in the postwar years the nuance of “carnal”, “sensual” and “physical”. Tsuge evidently feels that this nuance is not sufficiently clear to stand without this gloss. The distinction is indeed important and central to the argument he is making as well.

²⁶Barbara Ruch has translated this article, “*Nikutai bungaku kara nikutai seiji made*,” as “From Carnal Literature to Carnal Politics.”

all of it. He is concerned that at some future time people “will get the idea that in about 1949 the Japanese people had their heads filled constantly with the business of coitus” (“From Carnal Literature to Carnal Politics” 247-248).

Physical concerns--how to survive--were literally the primary concern of the populace in the extremely difficult years after the war.²⁷ The Japanese postwar was a very desperate time of great physical and emotional desperation for civilians and soldiers alike, although in some differing ways. This difference is reflected in the fiction: Noma and his contemporaries drew on their own war experiences and wrote largely about soldiers and the war. The military world is at one remove from the work and actual experience of Ōe and Mishima, however. Some comments that one of the aspects separating the literature of Tamura Taijirō from similar writers such as Oda Sakunosuke and Sakaguchi Ango is his experience of the war--“an existence of nothing but sleeping, eating, and fighting” in Tamura’s words--that continued into the postwar period. The sense from Tamura is that there was no perceptible change in lifestyle from wartime to the immediate postwar, for the primary concerns of life are still “eating, sleeping, and fighting (Sone, “Kaisetsu” 240-241). The same sense is

²⁷Tsurumi Shunsuke notes, for one, that the Department of Welfare decreed in 1941 “that a male adult engaged in normal work would need 2,400 calories per day. . . . In 1945 [this figure] was further lowered to 1,793 calories. As a natural result, the health of the nation deteriorated” (85-86). These increasingly lowered official caloric standards represent an attempt to correlate need with availability. It is a statistic that suggests just how bleak those years were. Another result was time spent trying to procure food via the blackmarket or other avenues, issues that loom large in postwar literature. For further detail see Tsurumi’s chapter entitled “Everyday Life During the War”, pp. 85-93.

forcefully expressed by Noma Hiroshi in a work such as “A Red Moon in Her Face.” John Nathan discusses this set of issues in regard to Ōe (“Introduction xii-xv) and Okuno Takeo discusses it in relation to Mishima (“Mishima Yukio” 215-217). In Kimura Yoshinaga’s words:

During the war years “to live” simply meant finding enough food to get by. If one did not find sufficient food, it meant death. Now when peace finally returned it was no longer sufficient to simply get by. One was constantly drawn to find the meaning of existence, to find why one was living. Mishima Yukio, born and reborn any number of times, is of this age. No one else so persistently thrust issues of life and death under our noses as Mishima Yukio. (9)

The disillusion, despair, and anger at the outcome of a war to which so much had been sacrificed, and which had proved, literally in a day’s time, to have been for naught and long a lost cause, left much of the populace with a keen sense of absurdity, anxiety, and *angst*, terms that immediately resonate with the existentialist paradigm.²⁸ Day-to-day existence had likewise been reduced to the body’s materiality; the need for material (i.e. physical) care was foremost. What is unifying about the postwar existence is the foregrounding of bodily issues--through wartime lack, poverty, and necessity--by physical deprivation and necessity.

The history of existentialism in Japan as plotted by Kuno and Tsurumi is striking because their perspective, writing in 1956, gives them a different chronological framework than most commentators who took up the subject late in the 1960s; thus,

²⁸We have seen this connection made by Kuno and Tsurumi; see also the discussion by Sone Hiroyoshi (*Shōwa bungaku arubamu* 18-20).

The importation of existentialist-style thought took place from the end of Meiji through the early years of the Taisho period, and the names of Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Heidegger, and others quickly became familiar [to Japanese intellectuals]. However, it was in the years following 1933 that Japanese existentialist thinkers appeared. The numerous people who turned away from Marxism (*tenkōsha*) became the first Japanese-born existentialists. (184)

After stating that the postwar “was an age when the common people were not able to live save by criminal activity”—a sentiment born out in much contemporary writing, Ishikawa Jun’s “Yakeato no Iesu”, for example—they project that, in this age of no rules one is forced to determine one’s own freedom. This reminds us how bleak those years were. The *tenkō* years presented the populace (and intellectuals) with an extreme situation that demanded the utmost in personal sacrifice to establish one’s freedom, and so were—and in the same way, for Kuno and Tsurumi—the postwar years. This then, the postwar Japanese situation, becomes an existential situation of anguish and despair where individuals are forced—“condemned” as Sartre would have it—to make their own rules and establish their own freedoms (192-194). This is clearly an overstatement, but it is a bold interpretation of existentialism in an influential work and the suggestions are pregnant. For one, they allow almost no distinction between prewar and postwar modes of thought, tying the postwar experience to the prewar *tenkō* and placing the initial importation of existentialist thought in the Meiji period. Nonetheless, what is striking, and what ties us directly to the work of many writers of this period, is this decided distrust of and disgust with the state and its ideology. This work also provides an intriguing model for reading the postwar in terms of Sartre and existentialism.

Kuno and Tsurumi establish the existentialist sensibility as being anti-establishment in nature because one is forced to choose their own freedom in the face

of a normalizing ideology. It becomes an “either/or” situation. One is forced to actively oppose the state and society in order to posit one’s own freedom. Individual against state establishes a paradigm that will become increasingly important to our understanding of the postwar years. The individual is placed in a situation of defining oneself as an individual *vis-à-vis* the State, as many of the writers discussed here will underscore; it is only with the State in mind that individual action in the face of the State and reigning ideology takes on meaning. Herein lies the antagonism of the individual body (*nikutai*) with the national polity (*kokutai*).

Tsuge Teruhiko in his cogent synopsis of existentialism in Japan also takes the reader back to the prewar decades of the 1920s and 1930s. After suggesting a definition of existentialism as “dread in the face of freedom” and “*angst* (*fuan*) in relation to the Other and to things” one finds it is but a short step back to the 1920s in Japanese literature. He reminds the reader of Akutagawa Ryūnosuke, for one. Any mention of *fuan* immediately associates with the well-known phrase from Akutagawa’s suicide note, “bonyari toshita fuan” (a nebulous *angst*) that he writes suffuses his spirit and is a dominant impetus behind his suicide. Tsuge also refers the reader to the atmosphere found in the fiction of Edogawa Ranpō, a sort of despair at the seemingly inexplicable goings-on in the world. In the mystery stories of Ranpō one is faced with inexplicable phenomena that defy rational explanation. *Fuan* is similarly a world that defies “sense” leaving one with feelings of disorientation, *angst*, or *malaise* (“Jitsuzonshugi” 130; see also “Nichijō to hinichijō no hazama” 1-3).

Kamiya Tadataka, when discussing “Shōwa Literature,” also takes the reader back to the twenties and thirties to show that the dominant themes of postwar literature are already in evidence before the war. In his reading, the literary history of the Showa period has been a movement between the poles of spiritual concerns and bodily concerns, between internal pressures and external pressures. The period and its

literature exists in the shadow of increasing external pressure from the State coupled with an increasing internal sense of futility among intellectuals, especially in the prewar years. Kamiya finds that the focus of intellectual discussions of the war such as the *kindai no chōkoku* discussions is not on issues of winning or losing as much as on the location of the spiritual and the body *vis-à-vis* the war. He offers Akutagawa and Arishima Takeo, both of whom committed suicide out of frustration in the face of increasing governmental and societal pressure. I would add that while the reality of that pressure can be debated, internal and external pressures came together and proved unbearable for many, and these realities find expression in literature.

Also in the background is the Proletarian literature of the prewar years because of its emphasis on the body. Kobayashi Takiji's death at the hands of police interrogators is then "the action of one who sacrifices the body (*nikutai*) to preserve the spirit (*seishin*)" (Kamiya 4). His death contributed to the *angst* (*fuan*) and general *malaise* felt by intellectuals as the physical body was continually assailed in the name of the spiritual by the State; in this, Kobayashi Takiji's death is metonymical. Proletarian literature's emphasis on the body is in many ways a reaction to the "spiritual" concerns of the "confessional novelists" such as Shiga Naoya. The "confessional novel," the *watakushishōsetsu*, is also radically individual in focus. It is a fictional form built on the self. This self is also the physical self, the body in its immediate surroundings of bar, geisha, and domestic squalor (Iwano Hōmei, Shiga Naoya, and Kasai Zenzō come to mind). In this fictional practice it is often the self in flight away from external pressure that retreats into the internal. This leads then, intimates Kamiya, to the work of writers such as Shiina, Noma, Ango, and others that often looks like *watakushishōsetsu*, and may even be *watakushishōsetsu*, where the narrative is of an individual self that is hemmed-in and under siege by the external. Kamiya paints with a broad brush, but the picture that emerges is enlightening: before

the war the solid, material self of Proletarian fiction or the retreat into the self that characterizes *watakushishōsetsu* presumed that the self was stable and defined the area of final stability. The self is a solid kernel of knowable reality and “truth”, and, although under siege, it is still stable, concrete, identifiable. In the fiction of Shiina, Noma, and Ango the individual may still be a final safe area, but that safety is no longer assured. The reality of the individual as a continuing material entity is in doubt. The boundaries are not clear. The force that impinges on that final space and would crush the self is the State that killed Kobayashi Takiji in both prewar and postwar articulations. The physical body gets, it seems to me, even more emphasis in the postwar years as though to articulate the concrete space the individual occupies, as a way to offset the onslaught of the State and its power.

Without a physical body, any talk of individuality becomes meaningless in this (or any other) conception. The abstractions and self-referentiality of Shiga, *et al.*, seem even further removed from the concerns of living in the wake of Kobayashi’s death. From this backdrop develops the distrust of the abstract notion of “self” and a concern for the concrete and tangible “material” body. When Horii Ken’ichi discusses this aspect of Proletarian literature, he remarks on the interest in the body that is integral to it and identifies in it a mind-body dualism (*seishin* in contrast to the *shintai*, *nikutai*) that is displayed in the emphasis on physical labor and the worker’s body. This reflects the Marxist concerns of this literature, a focus on the physical labor, the labor of the worker’s body, an important backdrop where the body is a commodity, is a thing. This body is crushed in work, crushed in a cement factory as in “Semento daru kara no tegami” and other works of writers such as Hayama Yoshiki or Kuroshima Denji (Horii 120). This is exactly the framework taken over by Tamura Taijirō, but given different emphases following the battlefield experience. Horii also explores this point, noting that, “On this point of there being no way to be free in

relation to the State (*kokka*), the soldier's body (*shintai*) was more like that of a slave than a commodified body (*shintai*). It seemed the whole purpose for this body was to be harmed" (127).

This is a tendency given expression by Nakamura Miharu as well, who notes that "In the most noted cases of the Proletarian arts, bodies took the brunt of the nation's authority and monopoly capitalism and were placed in a situation where the individual (*kojin*) was set-up *vis-à-vis* the repressed body (*shintai*) and the oppressive system" (139). The body was a central concern in Proletarian literature. The body that is described in Proletarian literature is intentionally at odds with that expressed in the *watakushishōsetsu* tradition. While the Proletarian writers were concerned with the "mass" as the working class, Proletarian realism attempted to describe the mass in order to render a description of the individual. The goal was to describe the many individuals that comprise that mass (Ichiko 6:72-74; Odagiri 4:451-454). The body is also of central concern for the State in that it is a crucial commodity in whatever endeavor is undertaken by the State. This was especially true for wartime Japan, a nation in great need of bodies to send to the front.

Proletarian literature emphasizes the body as commodity. More precisely, as Horii points out, the labor of the body is the commodity. This literature highlights the radical separation of body from spirit (here, the unsubstantial, personal, spiritual) that is encouraged by capitalism. This sense of separation becomes accentuated in wartime as the state uses bodies for their fighting value, seemingly intent only on bringing them harm (as noted above). The body is then little more than a resource, expendable and replaceable. Thus, when Proletarian writers begin to write fiction set in the war years--stories by Kuroshima Denji set in China, for example--we find a soldier, like a laborer, that is a commodity, that is a body only, which is not freed even in death.

There is another important way in which the concerns for physicality that overlap with the existentialist movement of the late 1940s and early 1950s in Japan reaches back to make use of issues in the 1920s and 1930s. At stake in the existentialist discussions, especially in Japan, is the meaning of the individual and the individual's stance in the world. These are prewar concerns that carried through to postwar literature. In the existentialist context especially this becomes a discussion of the individual *vis-à-vis* the State. The prewar interest in the so-called *kindaiteki jiga* is but one aspect of the prewar interest in the meaning of the individual expressed in the self-centeredness of the *watakushishōsetsu*,²⁹ in Marxist and Proletarian concerns with the working man and the working body, as well as the self that is implicit in Democracy, which, as noted by Tomi Suzuki, itself extends back to the influence of Christianity and the *jiyuminken undō* of the Meiji era (52-55).

Noma Hiroshi's work provides a rich link in this regard, concerned, as he is, with the self (*jiga*): "Noma, in various of his postwar works, gave structure not just to the *jiga*, but the *jiga* that is moved by sexual desire. . . . Thus, in the world of Noma Hiroshi's first work, described as it is with an extreme sense of the body (*shintai teki*) together with the issues of relations between the Self and Other and of the individual self, there is a clear relationship to Existentialism" (Tsuge,

²⁹The pejorative sense of "self-centered" is intentional, for it reflects the reaction of many to this mode of writing. It is a position voiced most consistently by Nakamura Mitsuo; see also Edward Fowler. Issues of the self are especially focused in discussions of the *kindaiteki jiga*, a huge topic that has also produced shelves of books. I refer the reader to the collection edited by Inoue Shun for a sociological/philosophical approach. Ogawa Kazuo provides helpful background as well, from a literary viewpoint.

“Jitsuzonshugi” 140-141). This is a link that will become increasingly important in this discussion, where the self is conceived of as a body, the body is related to sex, and this then leads one to the Japanese discourse on existentialism. As Tsuge is intimating, Noma is a prototypical existentialist in Japan because the concerns of existentialism, taken as they are with issues of self and physical body, come together in this work. This is, again, the manner by which readings of Noma’s early fiction correlate with the early readings of Sartre’s fiction.

Issues of individuality, often anti-establishment expressions of individuality, are the point of much of Arima Tatsuo’s discussion of Japanese intellectuals.³⁰ Arima describes the Japanese intellectual as one who understands “freedom” to be a wanton disregard for convention. In Arima’s description the Japanese intellectual understands that social liberation means freedom for the individual, means individuation. (This is the “failure” of the intellectuals’ freedom referred to in the title of his volume, *The Failure of Freedom*.) For example, he says of Ōsugi Sakae:

“[Ōsugi] shared with his contemporaries a common preoccupation: concern with the nature of the individual. Yet he was one of the first to voice an accusation

³⁰Flaunting convention is one of the themes underlying the literature of Tamura Taijirō, Sakaguchi Ango, and other writers being discussed here. Sartre as an anti-establishment figure plays a large role in this discourse as well and is alluded to, in the European context, by Mark Poster who has written, essentially, that Sartre has always challenged official liberal culture. The philosophical works undermined the dominant, bourgeois theories of knowledge based on rationalism and positivism. The literary writings are decidedly modernist, opposing the basic assumptions of the classical bourgeois novel (Poster 9). This side of Sartre received important focus in the construction of his image within Japanese intellectual circles.

against intellectuals who showed insufficient social concern as they probed for a definition of the individual. It was not obsession with the individual that was wrong, Ōsugi believed, but the particular type of asocial individualism that plagued Japanese intellectuals. (61)

The problem, according to this explanation, was that the intellectual is asocial and uncommitted, refusing to interact with social issues. This concern for the intellectual's introversion is also the diagnosis that Nakamura Mitsuo delivers concerning the *watakushishōsetsu*. Nakamura is consistently critical of the intellectual that describes his wanton, but individual, lifestyle, which comes to mean no concern for societal issues or anything else beyond the parameters of his *kotatsu*. Likewise Maruyama Masao, who is unable to distinguish between this autobiographical fiction and the *nikutai bungaku* under discussion here, writes: "The minds of our writers cling like leeches to natural, sensual phenomena, and lack a really free flight of the imagination, so in one sense all of our literature is 'carnal'" (*Carnal* 251). Nakamura's (and Arima's) unshakable concern for this issue is precisely because it is seen as so pervasive and insidious in the early decades of this century. Arima quotes from an article by Ōsugi in the 1910s to underscore how extreme was concern with the individual and how widespread that concern was:

In those days, the literary and intellectual circles were saturated with ideas of individualism. Self-perfection, the fulfillment of the life of the self, the isolation of the self from its social surroundings, the conscious escape from the social reality that interferes with the purity of the self, quiet and introspective meditation—these were the reality and practice of the "individualists." (60-61)

In all of this it is the highly aestheticized confessional literary practice of writers such as Shiga Naoya, Satō Haruo, Nagai Kafū, and others comprising a sort of "spiritualism" that Tamura Taijirō will rail against after the war in his discussion of

nikutai bungaku. In the face of the destabilizing and unsubstantial spiritual sensibility that Tamura finds in these works, he will propose a radical forefronting of the physical body in an attempt to completely do away with the spiritual, unsubstantial body.

Kamiya writes of the emphasis on the physical:

Concerning literature of the Showa age, we can speak of an art-for-art's sake [i.e. Shiga, *et al.*] aesthetics that pursued as far as it could go a spiritualism (*seishinshugi*) that sacrificed the body (*nikutai*) or we can speak of Proletarian literature looking for a way out of an idealized 'self-consciousness.' Both ended at a dead-end, however. This was the time when the *nikutai* appeared as the extreme idealization of the spiritual. (6)

That is, one finds that the ethereal sorts of writing that seem to banish the physical, in the end, brings the discussion full circle, back to the physical. Interest in the physical body is evidenced in Proletarian literature of the prewar years, but as Kamiya goes on, this extreme emphasis on the physical does not come to the fore until after the end of the Second World War with the works of Tamura and Ango. In this scheme the *nikutai* was repressed, but ineffectively, for in the end it was the physical that asserted itself. Tamura Taijirō will make the same connection, namely that the spiritualized forces of the State were effectively of a piece with the spiritualizing tendencies of mainstream literature. This historical moment when the *nikutai* reasserts itself is the moment in which Sartre's short fiction was first read. Further, it was read as participating in just such a discourse.

The Other

Before discussing that reception of Sartre's fiction in Japan, I want to discuss one other framework for discussing postwar literature, the role of the Other. The Other is a central construct in Sartre's paradigm; it also proves very influential in our

reading of postwar Japanese fiction. I introduce it here because in the reading of Japan's postwar literature through the discourse of existentialism it is another tool in our understanding of this fiction. The construct of Self and Other, a central aspect of Sartre's philosophy, has a place in this literary treatment because of the power it demonstrates as a tool for unlocking the power and appeal of these works. That is, I will elucidate the place of the body in this discourse because that was the contemporary response to Sartre's fiction. I am reading back from the current perspective and applying the construct of Self and Other to enrich our readings of this fiction. I feel justified in doing so because underlying that postwar discourse was the still unarticulated philosophical concepts of Self and Other.

Discussions of Other and otherness have become numbingly pervasive in contemporary writings about literature, so much so that Michael Theunissen can write in his classic study of the Other that, "Few issues have exercised as powerful a hold over the thought of this century as that of 'the Other'" (1). French thinking especially has made prodigious use of this construct, and while the lineage is often traced back to Sartre, the Self and Other construct as it is usually understood, along with the manner in which it is usually applied to a wider social sphere, should properly be traced to the work of Simone de Beauvoir: "The category of the *Other* is as primordial as consciousness itself. In the most primitive societies, in the most ancient mythologies, one finds the expression of a duality--that of the Self and the Other" (xvi). While her discussion focuses on relations between men and women (as does Sartre's but in quite a different way) a sentence such as the following is illuminating in its broader applicability to social conceptions like those found in the fiction under discussion here: "Things become clear. . . if, following Hegel, we find in consciousness itself a fundamental hostility toward every other consciousness; the subject can be posed only in being opposed--he sets himself up as the essential, as opposed to the other, the

inessential, the object” (xvii).³¹ We find here a social application that is quite lacking in Sartre, and this is the strain picked up by later French thought.

Thus, whether Lacan³² and his mirrors, in turn reflected in the writing of critics such as Julia Kristeva, and certainly not excluding writers of a different vein such as Jacques Derrida, much has been made of Other and Otherness.³³ It is not my

³¹I thank Susan Bordo for pointing this out to me; I refer the reader to her article “The Feminist as Other” where she explores this lineage. In many ways de Beauvoir’s conceptualization conforms more closely to Sartre’s fiction than to the more rigorous *Being and Nothingness*. This may suggest the different focus that is inevitable in a fictional representation organized around these concepts. If that is so, it is even less a surprise that the fiction of Sartre and the fiction of the Japanese writers under consideration here appear so closely aligned in their concerns.

³²The construct of the Self and Other is a given for Lacan, for whom speech is dependent on the existence of the Other: “For resistance, in fact, is embodied in the system of the ego and the other” (I: 50). For a full discussion see pages 38-51. It is also interesting to note that Lacan invokes Sartre’s concept of “bad faith” in the same manner, as of a paradigm without need of qualification (I: 29-30).

³³When medieval scholars turn to this topic they too find its resonance in a much older discourse: “As both the locus and the object of sensual and erotic pleasure, as the site of satisfaction and desire and, in the person of the ‘other’, as the goal of desire, the physical body pervades Western literature, from the Song of Songs to the courtly romance, to the lyric poetry of the Renaissance.” And further, because the body “participat[es] in the divine as well as the mundane, as an object both to be reviled and exalted, its legitimate place must, time and again, be redefined” (Jaouën and Semple

intent to make use of these discussions, although they would enrich these readings by taking us in yet another direction (which is only to say they must wait for a later study). In the interest of being more strictly chronological I will focus on constructs and discussions contemporary with the fiction I have introduced. That is, I will limit myself to the discourse on Sartre that coincides chronologically with postwar fiction being produced in Japan. To delimit the approach still further, I am excavating the postwar articulations of the body that result from these writers' understanding of the discourse on existentialism; this excavation proves, in turn, to hint at the Self-Other construct implicit in Sartre's fiction if not articulated until the philosophy appearing later in Japan. Because it is implicit, fleshing it out as I am here proves a way to touch on underlying themes and provide richer readings in that fiction.

Sartre's Self-Other construct presupposes a humanity based on physicality. This is one reason to include this aspect of his thought here. Further, these are the two strains of his thought that gained great attention in Japan of the late 1940s; the relationship of one to the other is worth exploring, especially as the issue of physicality had such wide appeal for Japanese readers. Sartre articulates it in *Being and Nothingness* this way:

Up to this point we have described only our fundamental relation with the Other.

This relation has enabled us to make explicit our body's three dimensions of being. And since the original bond with the Other first arises in connection with

1). Likewise, Jacques Le Goff reminds us that the body has long been of great concern in the West: "Among the greatest cultural revolutions associated with the triumph of Christianity in the West, one of the greatest concerned the body" (83). For a concise introduction on the place of Otherness in the currents of twentieth-century philosophical thinking see Fred Dalmyr, especially p. x and Theunissen 1-6.

the relation between my body and the Other's body, it seemed clear to us that the knowledge of the nature of the body was indispensable to any study of the particular relations of my being with that of the Other. These particular relations, in fact, on both sides presuppose facticity; that is, our existence as body in the midst of the world. (361)

While it is incorrect in the light of Sartre's total conception to try to separate the physical body from consciousness, Sartre comes close to saying here that the foundational ground of existence begins with the physical body. While body and consciousness are inextricable one from the other, simultaneous in development and conception; and while Sartre consistently resists a developmental reading--first body then consciousness--in a paragraph like that above he comes very near to positing just such a progression. If "existence precedes essence" one is tempted to read that the human body, as material and representing facticity, begins as an object, a lump of bone and muscle that later acquires consciousness. That is, a rock or an inkwell are existence only; being object they cannot transcend their wholly physical nature and "be." They are wholly object, lacking consciousness. The first necessary step in differentiating object from human is in the application of consciousness to move that physical object--the body of bone and muscle--to perform an activity. A repetition of that activity becomes the performance of a role. Carrying out and fulfilling that role gives one essence, being, personality. Personhood is the result of consciously willing the fleshly object to be: to perform the role of greengrocer by making that body sell cabbages and cucumbers, to be a waiter by delivering coffee and omelettes, provides an individual with essence and personality. This is how one transcends the body's materiality. Each individual is responsible for their own essence. Each individual is required to determine their own existence. By being, we are. Never stable, always in

fear of bad faith, constantly threatened by the Other, this body-consciousness must always be.

This body is not alone in the world; there are meetings with other bodies likewise working out their own existences. “This means that while I can not [*sic*] prove the fact that the very being of my consciousness is affected by another consciousness, I do in fact experience it. The connecting link here is the body. . . . There is the body-for-the-Other and ‘the body-seen-by-the-Other’” (Barnes xlix). The body is what allows me to interact with the world. While the body is not merely a tool of the consciousness, it is still true that the body stands between us and the world. The Other causes me to be aware of my being; each is then painfully aware of the Other while dependent on the Other for certainty of existence.

Furthermore the body--our body--has for its peculiar characteristic the fact that it is essentially that which is *known by the Other*. What I know is the body of another, and the essential facts which I *know* concerning my own body come from the way in which others see it. Thus the nature of *my* body refers me to the existence of others and to my being-for-others. (*Being and Nothingness* 218)

There is then a conflict of Looks, of consciousnesses, and this is threatening. By its constitution the body looks at another and in that look there is a threat and a limiting. The Look of the Other is threatening because it threatens to render me into an object. “What I constantly aim at *across* my experiences are the Other’s feelings, the Other’s ideas, the Other’s volitions, the Other’s character. This is because the Other is not only the one whom I see but the one *who sees me*” (*Being and Nothingness* 228). The approaching body looks and sees me. Further I fear that the Other sees me not as a waiter on break (my self-conception) but as a bum napping on a park bench. This Other threatens to steal my freedom of self-determination by casting me as something

else. I am a waiter only to pay the rent, I am really an artist. "I must obtain for the Other the *recognition* of my being. . . . As I appear to the Other, so I am. . . . In order to make myself recognized by the Other, I must risk my own life" (*Being and Nothingness* 237). The client demands an omelette and threatens to wrest my freedom from me by allowing my existence only as waiter, by negating my existence as an artist.

Freedom is made possible by the moment-to-moment necessity of choice; I am thus condemned to assert this freedom moment-to-moment. Within the individual body is contained all the contingent facts of birth--race, class, personality perhaps--that establishes one's facticity. These facts cannot be altered; precisely because they cannot be chosen they also highlight the necessity of choice, the freedom one has and must exercise. That is,

This inapprehensible body is precisely the necessity that *there be a choice*, that I do not exist *all* at once. In this sense my finitude is the condition of my freedom, for there is no freedom without choice; and in the same way that the body conditions consciousness as pure consciousness of the world, it renders consciousness possible even in its very freedom. (*Being and Nothingness* 328)

Freedom begins with the condition of my body because it must start at my facticity. Its finitude is the foundation of freedom, the first barrier to be overcome. My acting on that body is an exercise of my freedom.

I act and react to the Look of the Other. The self also casts fixating Looks on the approaching body; that body must then act and assert itself. Both individuals are thus condemned, each trying to determine their own identity and necessarily fixing that of the Other. Each individual is *free* to choose their identity, but they are also *required* to choose. This is the terrible burden of freedom. The choosing can never stop and the Other forces me to make a choice, thus "Hell is other people" as Sartre has

famously declared. It is so because of this never-ending dervish of determinacy. It is not simply that one can choose, but that one *must* choose. It is up to the individual, else the Other determines for the individual. Thus, in summarizing his remarks on the body, Sartre writes that this movement begins with the body:

Since the original bond with the Other first arises in connection with the relation between my body and the Other's body, it seemed clear to us that the knowledge of the nature of the body was indispensable to any study of the particular relations of my being with that of the Other. These particular relations, in fact, on both sides presuppose facticity; that is, our existence as body in the midst of the world. (*Being and Nothingness* 361)

The war and postwar experience for both Japanese soldier and civilian constructed an especially onerous facticity, an especially limiting set of circumstances. That experience left many acutely aware of the body as physical object, as lump of flesh.³⁴ The deprivations and struggles of those years underscored the primacy of one's physical body, devaluing consciousness in the struggle for day-to-day survival; at the same time the State was demanding attention in the spiritual realm. This is the point of discussion that is introduced by Tamura Taijirō and Sakaguchi Ango. Which is to say, the war left a keen sense in society of the sort of physicality of the body posited by Sartre, a physicality that only is separate from inert object when willed into

³⁴Sartre contrasts the object and the flesh in *Being and Nothingness*, while the Japanese read out of Sartre's fiction a conflation of these two. Sartre discusses the flesh in relation to the caress, for when one wants to claim ownership of the body of the beloved one wants to "appropriate as *flesh*" the body of the beloved (*Being and Nothingness* 389). This word *flesh* corresponds to *nikutai*, hence it is a distinction reflected in French as well as Japanese, as we shall see.

action. The Other plays a crucial role in this, for it is the Look of the Other that we find so threatening, that forces us to be concerned with how we are seen. It also underscores our freedom and our existence by forcing us to be aware that we are conscious and free. It begins the process by which we are made acutely aware of the need to exercise our freedom, to affect how the Other sees us. The war and postwar was a time when the effort and the will to survive took all of one's energy. Thus, to initiate a discussion of Sartre with a discussion of the body may not be the usual practice outside of Japan, but it is a defensible proposition. Sartre's ideas were conflated with these issues of physicality when he was first received in Japan. Sartre's writings will support such a reading. Those issues of physicality were taken in Japan to be issues of sexuality as well, a point that Sartre's translator into English seemed to sense as well and one she found being overlooked in English-language discussions of *Being and Nothingness*: "While the body is that through which the Look is experienced, it is sexuality which just as much as in Freudian psychology--though in a far different way--lies at the origin of all human relations" (Barnes xli). Not just the body, but a specifically sexual body lies at the base of everything. As if to conform to Sartre's general framework, the physical that demanded such attention in postwar Japan conforms to the heightened sense of individual responsibility and individual response that Sartre describes.³⁵ Thus, to discuss the body (*nikutai*) here is to invite discussion of the Self and Other because of their close, if implicit relationship. The relationship is clear, of course, in Sartre's philosophy and

³⁵Masao Miyoshi talks about this tendency at length under the rubric of *shutaisei* (*Off Center* 102-125). This is a subject that gets extensive treatment in J. Victor Koschmann's recent book on the *shutaisei* discussions; see especially pp. 57-60 for overlap to the concerns I am discussing here.

suggested in the fiction. The suggestion seems to have asserted itself as well, to postwar Japanese readers, and as they write of the body the related concept of Self and Other also asserts itself there.

This corresponds to the burden of “being” in Sartre, the weight of responsibility implied in living. Herein lies the danger of existing in “bad faith,” i.e. not of being true to one's self but of acting according to others' expectations. It is living as though what the Other see me as, what I assume the Other sees me as (since I can never fully know), is not the full reality of who I am. The Other is in large part responsible for the actions I take up: “The concrete relations with the Other . . . are wholly governed by my attitudes with respect to the object which I am for the Other. . . . The Other *looks* at me and as such he holds the secret of my being, he knows what I *am*” (*Being and Nothingness* 363).

Thus, an awareness of the materiality and facticity of one's body, its corporal limits, is the starting point for Sartre's philosophical and fictional representations. Roquentin's nausea is prompted by his discovery of the overflowing and inexorable materiality of things, the absurd existence of objects that push in on him, for example: “The chestnut tree pressed itself against my eyes. . . . If you existed you had *to exist all the way*” (*Nausea* 127-128). For postwar Japanese, this physicality had become equally unavoidable and threatening. The difficulty of moving beyond it prompted a similar nausea and fear. Edith Kern underscores this sense when she writes that “Roquentin's first intuitive certainty is the existence of the body. At a certain moment the sensation of Nausea and his realization that it is *his* Nausea, a secretion of *his* body are one and the same thing. Indeed, it is not only through nausea but as Nausea that his body's functioning discloses itself to him as *his*” (97).

Freedom lies in the ability to choose whether to be a waiter or an artist. In freedom is contained a negativity; negativity is the source of freedom and the ability to

choose soon becomes a necessity by which, in the end, individuals find themselves condemned and responsible to that freedom. For Sartre the ability to negate is the mark and the means of our freedom. The ability, and even the desire, to negate is proof of our freedom to do so. It proves we are conscious and free. The ability to negate some possibilities is the same action as my freedom to choose others. In the very act of perceiving/imagining is an act of negating, as when I look at a cube: to say that I “see” it as a cube, including the three planes hidden from view is to “negate” other possibilities for the reverse of the cube. I could imagine that behind the three planes of a cube is the face of a gargoyle or that under a chair are not arabesques, a continuation of the pattern in the carpet at my feet, but dragons (Sartre, *Psychology* 261-263). I usually choose not to. I negate those possibilities. The ability to negate other possibilities is the same action as my freedom to choose the existence of arabesques, rather than dragons, under my chairs. In this way negation and freedom come to be obverse and reverse of the same coin. Freedom and negation are inextricably interlinked in Sartre’s thought. Freedom cannot exist without negation.

Sartre’s contribution was to elevate this awareness of freedom and concomitant sense of *angst* to a way of life, a total and consuming concern.³⁶ The freedom to choose becomes a cursed necessity because choosing was proven to be necessary for any action whatsoever. A choice must always be made. In existentialist fiction this sensibility is accentuated by the extreme situations of war and the meaninglessness in

³⁶Jacques Guicharnaud’s reminiscences make this point in a refreshingly unpretentious manner. Admitting that there was substantial pretense and silliness among the young men and women who gathered in the cafes in “those years,” as well as mistakes and fumbings on Sartre’s part, what remains is a seriousness and a responsibility in ones’ approach to the world.

which one is forced to carve out existence by oneself, for oneself, totally alone and radically independent. Those who have experienced the war and are now compelled to live through its almost equally tumultuous aftermath become poignantly aware of this radical and onerous freedom that is their's precisely because of their physical body, the demands of survival, and the pressure to exist. Survival forces one to act, to assert, to exercise the freedom that is predicated on a negativity. The freedom to act is a necessity, it is inescapable. The war and its aftermath left many Japanese with a keen sense of the burden of this freedom. It is a pressure many already knew when they encountered Sartre's fiction; how that encounter is evidenced in their fiction is the next subject of inquiry.

Chapter 2: Postwar Bodies

“All these changes concern objects.”

--*Nausea*

“The physical body is at once our most intimate experience and
our most inescapable public form.”

--Dorinda Outram

I. The Reception of Sartre's Fiction in Japan

Japanese writers encountered Sartre through his fiction rather than his philosophical writings. This is largely because of the order in which translations of Sartre's work were introduced into Japan. The philosophical treatises only became available in Japanese translation some years after the fiction. The philosophical work of Sartre was to have great impact on the intellectuals of Japan, but that impact was never as dramatic as that of the fiction. The Sartre first encountered in Japan was a writer of fiction, and within that rubric, a writer taken with issues of the body. I am interested in reconstructing this initial impact of the fiction because the themes that were part of that discussion have persisted down to the present.

The greatest of impacts had to do with Sartre's fiction as a literature of the body, a carnal literature, a prose fiction that undertook to resolve many of the issues of physicality and carnality so central to the war and postwar experience. This, at least, is how this is remembered and reworked in the writings of its intellectuals. The war

and postwar yielded a heightened concept of the body. The physicality of Sartre's work struck the Japanese readers with great force in the years following the war. Sartre's emphasis on the physical seemed to reflect the everyday reality of postwar life. In this context Sartre was first read by these Japanese writers as another writer, like themselves, confounded by issues of the body. That is, Sartre was seen as a writer presenting "solutions" to the "problem" that the body presented in the postwar years.

The excitement that these issues in Sartre's work provoked is conveyed in a special edition of the literary magazine *Bungaku* (March, 1963) devoted to "Sartrean literature" (*Sarutoru no bungaku*). Shimizu Kitarō describes there the interest accorded Sartre's work in the late 1940s when Shimizu helped to organize a lecture series on twentieth-century literature and philosophy. His recollection is valuable here for the recreation of the fervor that surrounded Sartre's work at the time. It is a level of interest difficult to imagine, fifty years later:

Whether it was the Spring of 1947 or of the following year I no longer recall, but at any rate, we rented a school building that was still standing in the charred remains of Kanda and opened a lecture series on twentieth-century philosophy and literature. Nor can I recall any longer just who gave lectures about what, exactly, except for one evening when in accord with the enthusiastic desires of the participants we arranged a lecture entitled "Sartre's Existentialism." Well, that raised the first problem for those of us who thought we should try and satisfy this request of the participants [i.e., who to invite]. In contrast to the present day it was very difficult to get one's hands on Sartre's works, and more, there were no established scholars of the subject. At wit's end we applied to the French mission--the embassy had not yet been established--and luckily there was in government service a young man who had just graduated from the Sorbonne

and who was studying Sartre's ideas (*gakusetsu*), so we imposed upon him to give the talk. With that, the problem of a lecturer was solved, but not the problem of a translator. Had it been any run-of-the-mill topic, there would have been no lack of individuals willing to take on the task of translating. When we said that the talk was about "Sartre's Existentialism", no one would agree to the job claiming the topic was way over their heads. In the end, knowing it was going to be a tough one to get through, we decided to listen to the presentation without an interpreter.

He stepped up to the platform in white suit and necktie. The reason I clearly remember the white suit and tie is that of all the people who flooded that lecture hall (it held about two hundred) there was no thought of suits and ties: everyone wore greyed and stained dress shirts. The lecture, entirely in French, stretched on for an hour and a half. At first I was sitting down near the front. At first I was able to catch a single word here and there, but after that nothing. Meanwhile, people kept coming into the hall until before long I had been pushed out into the corridor. Among the now well over two hundred people in attendance, of those who understood the vocabulary of both French and Existentialism, there could not have been more than one or two. . . . There was an excited tension in the air like I have never seen in the many lecture series I have since organized around the country. The lecture came to an end without anyone understanding a single word. I asked people leaving the room for some impressions of the talk and on dirty and crumpled fragments of paper I found "Even though I understood absolutely nothing, I have never heard such a wonderful lecture." (73-74)

"Laugh if you will," he goes on, but such was the level of interest in Sartre and his ideas. Everyone knew, he writes, through magazines and papers, that these ideas

were all the rage in France, “even though it was a time when we couldn’t easily gain access to Sartre’s writings” such that no one knew any of the details. This may have been only faddishness, but the appeal is deeper than this and suggests Shimizu’s modesty.

Sartre provides historical affinities as well. He was a public intellectual who had participated in the war and was struggling with postwar issues of responsibility and survival. This too replicated the experience of Japanese writers and intellectuals, most of whom had been mobilized for the war effort and now were working through issues of complicity and responsibility, both personal and societal. The postwar generation had lived through the gamut of human experience, in particular had experienced a range of death and evil of a sort and breadth previously unimaginable and still inexplicable. These struck many as issues to be resolved in the language of fiction, as Edith Kern suggested, not in philosophic discourse. Further, postwar questions, particularly in Japan, were precisely the questions raised by Existentialism. As noted by Shirai Kōji, Sartre’s first translator, the basic query of the Japanese after the war was “what does it mean to be human?” (“Jitsuzonshugi ni tsuite” 228). People were struggling with questions of “What does it mean to exist?” “What does it mean to act?” “How does one undertake responsible action?” More poignantly, given historical precedents, “Given what has been done to us, and what we have done to others, how can we act?” This is Kikuchi Shōichi’s point when he writes already in 1947 that, “It is a fact that an interest in *Existenz* (*jitsuzon*), or phrased differently, an interest in understanding the phenomenon of humanity by means of an existentialist means, continually grows” (41). His point is that at this early date there was a decided interest in existentialism, even though he is by no means sure whether this “interest” should properly be called existentialist, nor whether this “existentialism” conforms to that in Europe. He is not even clear what this term existentialism means. Even so, he

is another witness to the degree of excitement Sartre's work called forth in Japan, even before it was clearly understood. Kikuchi is reiterating the experience narrated by Shimizu above.

Questions concerning the meaning of humanity were given renewed urgency by the war and these were questions addressed by Sartre. These are not new questions but the war experience gave them a sharper focus and urgency in the twentieth-century, as Sartre intimates when he recalled from his own experience that "the war really divided my life in two" (*Life/Situations* 48).³⁷ The change from war to postwar is then an experience that also affected Sartre greatly as he moved from prewar isolation to a postwar compulsion to interact with these sort of questions (Caws 98).

³⁷As Jerry Curtis has noted:

Both Camus and Sartre participated actively in the French Resistance during World War II and both, during and after the Nazi occupation of France, were engaged in separate endeavors to express ways to deal with the cruelty and absurdity of the predicament of 20th-century man. As Camus related, in an interview with the *Diario* of Sao Paulo, "Les ressemblances que l'on relève généralement entre les travaux de Sartre et les miens viennent, naturellement, du bonheur ou du malheur que nous avons de vivre à une même époque et face à des problèmes et des soucis communs." [The similarities that are generally pointed out between Sartre's works and mine are based on the happiness or unhappiness that we experience living in the same time period and having to confront mutual problems and concerns.] (38)

(The full interview can be found in Camus' *Essais*.)

The philosopher Umehara Takeshi describes his initial interest in existentialism, an interest rooted in his experience of the war. It is an experience he shares with Noma Hiroshi and many of the postwar writers, who were soldiers in that war. His too is an experience driven by the questions of existence and the meaning of existence, cast in a new light by the war.

It was after the war that I began to study existentialism as a philosophy. I had just returned from the war and it was no easy task to find meaning in living. We were like those who have gotten accustomed to pitch-blackness only to lose their sense of sight when they come out into bright light. Likewise, those of us who had spent the war focused on death only, even when out in the light where living was not so difficult--and especially then--continued as though still staring at the darkness. My youth had been spent looking at death. Many of my older friends died on the battlefield, so it was taken for granted that death would settle over us like a blanket sometime in the near future. It seemed to us that the very world had commanded that we would fight the bastards who defile our sacred Emperor and country, and even though it wasn't the voice of God we heard in that summons to death--whether the voice of God or of the devil wouldn't have mattered--it was foregone (*kakujitsu*); it was clear that we had been commanded to die and we would die in the near future. So, death being sure, being condemned by God was certainly preferable to being condemned by Evil. We committed everything to find the reason for this early death that was about to settle on us [searching for something sacred in it]. Perhaps we would hold up (*taeru*) for a bit longer under the sentence of death. However, we simply couldn't endure going to a meaningless death. Could there really be no reason for death? Many of us wandered the face of the earth, our eyes glazed over, like beggars in search for reasons in death and war.

But I didn't die. Many of my friends died, but I didn't die. I was lucky. Can that really be all there is to it? Not likely. Isn't it simply that I lacked the courage? Isn't the reason simply that I ran a few steps behind those friends who charged out over the top to meet the enemy? (10)

The search for meaning and reason in life took him to Heidegger, existentialism, and Sartre. What attracted him to Heidegger, he tells us, is that in Heidegger he "found a philosophy of death." He was later attracted to Sartre because of his Marxism which allows him to expect a future, to see a more positive future, in short because of the optimism that is assumed in this philosophy. If there is a future, there is reason to live, and change is possible. Individual action has meaning. If the future is not determined, the future can be affected by the individual. In the possibility of change there is freedom.

These responses to the war were not unique to young Japanese of course. Noma Hiroshi is one of the many who lived through the war, serving as a soldier, coming back to record in fiction those ideas and experiences heightened by the war (Nishikawa 230). When Noma tries to articulate what is "postwar" about postwar literature he explains this sense:

What is it that marks the initial movement of postwar literature? Of course it has to do with the ability one found at war's end to stand tall and straight even though it was a time when everything that had existed before had collapsed after having its foundations torn away. We were rent in two, crushed from above, thrown into the midst of death by the war's oppressive weight. Then in the midst of all that, whether one acted the part of an evil one and sided with Hell, or perhaps just the opposite and bravely hid one's true personality and preserved one's standing, one came to know that growing within oneself was the sort of person entirely different from the one they thought they knew previously. Here

we can locate the starting point for postwar literature. One received this existence in the midst of loss of existence on all sides, where everything had been burned and charred. (*Dainijitaisengo no bungaku* 9)

Questions of meaning follow on the heels of all wars but perhaps not as acutely nor across so many national boundaries as the great wars of this century.³⁸ Existentialism had this sort of philosophical attraction to many, as Shirai Kōji reminds us: “When the Second World War was over, at the time that existentialist literature was being advocated, the generation that in Japan as well [as other countries] was being called the postwar group (*sengoha*) began their vibrant activity” (217). Loneliness, *angst*, purposelessness, waiting, and enduring seem the products of war. To the writers at this time and to many who write of those years in Japan, there is indeed a strong link between war, postwar experiences, and existentialism. Tsuge Teruhiko, also speaking from the Japanese context, ties these reactions directly to Sartre’s concerns of freedom and existence when he writes that because various writers in the postwar years were all

placed in the extreme situation of the war, they were forced to rethink the essential meaning of the relations between self and Other, between self and things. This [similarity of experience] . . . displays the existentialist tendency of so much of so-called postwar literature throughout the world. (143-144)

³⁸For a discussion of the postwar situation in France, see the work of Tony Judt. See Peter Demetz’s *Postwar German Literature* for a description of these years in the German speaking countries; in particular his summary of the issues facing writers and intellectuals in the German Democratic Republic (35-39) and the Federal Republic of Germany (46-52), countries especially tormented by these issues, is relevant to this discussion.

Existentialism was in the air and that is precisely the moment when Sartre's fiction was introduced to the Japanese public.

Even though many of Sartre's major texts are prewar in France, their availability in Japan is postwar. He is, in Japan, a postwar phenomenon. More to the point, postwar writers took his prewar discussions as a possible way to express in fiction the issues they were facing.³⁹ First, many writers were unsure how to express their postwar situation and experience in fiction. Second, at issue was an appropriate way of handling issues of physicality. The postwar was marked by shortages in food and shelter. It was a time of black marketers and the collapse of existing morals. Issues of physicality and issues of individual freedom and responsibility became prominent. Sartre's fiction provided one possibility for the novelistic and technical issues facing these writers. In this sense one can say he presented technical solutions that writers in Japan were struggling with. These are also issues that Noma Hiroshi struggled with. His contributions overlap with Sartre's at this point. In fact, as Ishizaki Hitoshi notes after outlining this same history of postwar Japanese writers, "translations of Sartre, along with the fiction of such writers as Noma Hiroshi and Shiina Rinzō, then hold a place in postwar literature as being contemporaries" (120). Again, Sartre's fiction seemed to be taking up the same issues of such importance to the writers in Japan of the late 1940s, to such a degree that he was considered a contemporary, a writer working through similar issues and struggles.

Sartre's appearance in Japanese varies with the chronology in France largely because of the war's disruption of the flow of goods and ideas. In a personal

³⁹There is a parallel suggestive of further study here: Sartre's prewar fiction seemed especially appropriate as an expression of the postwar situation. Likewise, much "postwar" fiction in Japan was set and/or conceived before the war.

interview, Kanaseki Hisao, at the time an assistant editor at *Sekai bungaku*, the magazine that first published Sartre's "Intimacy", suggested that the earlier stories were not more widely read because of the magazines they appeared in and the wartime ambivalence towards Western (i.e. enemy) languages. These factors mitigated against a wider readership. "Intimacy," the initial story from Sartre's first collection (*The Wall*) appeared in Japan as "Mizuirazu" in the October 1946 issue of *Sekai bungaku*. This issue quickly sold out its press run of 180,000 copies, a surprising number given the postwar shortages of paper and other materials, as well as money to spend on magazines (rather than foodstuffs), and also given the literary focus of the magazine.⁴⁰ "Intimacy" was not the first of Sartre's stories to appear in Japan but it is

⁴⁰The "hunger" for literature in the immediate postwar years is often commented on (Keene 1: 962-965; Nishikawa 28-37; Sone, *Shōwa* 20). For a discussion of the importance of the journal *Sekai bungaku* see Nishikawa Nagao 36-37. Postwar France experienced the same burst in literary activity, activity which Annie Cohen-Solal attributes directly to Sartre:

The publication of the two volumes of *The Roads to Freedom* in September 1945 produced such an avalanche of articles because it occurred at a strategic moment during the renewal of the French press after wartime censorship. The regulations of August 26, 1944 started the age of freedom and provoked a real revolution in French journalism: hundreds of new publications and extreme competition. . . . "The revolution that has transformed the French press," Raymond Millety writes in 1946, "still astounds the rest of the world; it has no precedent. No other country has ever witnessed such an extensive renewal!" . . . Well prepared and well under way, the Sartre phenomenon that exploded in the

the first to have been widely read at the time of its introduction. The short story from which this collection took its title, "The Wall" had appeared in *Chūo kōron* in 1940 as "Kabe", translated by Horiguchi Daigaku. Shirai Kōji who had translated "The Room" as "Heya" explained in the afterward to its postwar appearance in a collection of Sartre's stories that, "I published this work ["The Room"] in translation during the war in a small camaraderie magazine (*dōjin zasshi*) but have completely reworked it at this time" (254). Sections of *Nausea* had appeared in 1941 as *Ōto*.

Ibuki Takehiko, the postwar translator of "Intimacy" and also the editor of *Sekai bungaku*, in a 1947 article introducing existentialism notes that "The Wall" and "Intimacy" had already been translated into Japanese (referring to Horiguchi Daigaku's translation)-- "and 'Intimacy' especially has caused quite a reaction in Japan." Further, he says, a translation of *Nausea* was soon to appear. "In fact, given that works of postwar literature can not be freely imported [in these postwar years], no postwar writings of Sartre, neither fiction (*sōsaku*) nor criticism are easy to gain access to. Fortunately I have in my possession some of those works . . ." Ibuki, in order to outline Sartre's ideas, writes that he must translate from a synopsis found in an issue of *Les Temps modernes* that he has been able to buy. "There is nothing to do but wait for importation of Sartre's great philosophical work *Being and Nothingness*," he tells his readers ("Sarutoru no sekai kan" 3). Again, immediately after the war Sartre's philosophical works were unavailable and only a limited number of works of fiction could be had, but the interest in them was great.

With this lack of primary sources a skewed impression of Sartre is no surprise. Sartre's work and the ideas of existentialism were known to be having a

Fall of 1945 became an ideal product for this starved press, the first real media product of the postwar period. (256)

great influence in Europe as evidenced in Shimizu Kitaro's recollection above. Japanese readers seemed to find from the available fiction--"Intimacy" in particular, as the first work to be widely read--that Sartre was writing erotic literature, and as such their impression was that existentialism was a form of literary eroticism. Ibuki continued in the article quoted above that while sexual liberation is one part of Sartre's ideas, it is only one part, and that Sartre's ideas of liberation stretch to and include all sorts of social liberation (21). Writing in 1946 he feels the need to correct the misconception that Sartre's work is wholly one of erotic physicality, another witness to the extent that Sartre was taken to be a writer of eroticism.

This misinterpretation was not quickly cleared up. Even now, Tsuge Teruhiko comments in 1994, existentialism is often conflated with Nihilism, and especially so early on. He continues that

one can say that interpretations of 'existentialism' placed great emphasis on the body (*nikutai*) and on descriptions of sex. This is because Sartre's story 'Intimacy' with its many descriptions of sexual activity was translated directly at war's end, followed thereupon by a translation of *Nausea*⁴¹ with translations of the philosophical works appearing rather late. ("Jitsuzonshugi" 129)

Ibuki Takehiko, in the afterword to his translation of "Intimacy", records the same phenomenon:

In Japan this work ["Intimacy"] was introduced in translation in 1946. From this single work many erroneously thought they knew all of existentialism. From this mistaken impression came the perception that, as a work about an impotent man and his wife, existentialism was eroticism and that it is associated

⁴¹Tsuge is somewhat mistaken, for parts of *Nausea*, translated by Shirai Kōji, had appeared in 1941.

with the literary activity of the postwar sort of carnal literature. (“Yakusha no kotoba” 251)

He goes on to stress that there is nothing romantic or sentimental about Sartre’s work and its treatment of sex; in fact, Sartre’s work—*Nausea* in particular—is predicated on a disgust with the material and the body. Ibuki overstates the case, but he is writing in 1950 and this underscores how entrenched was the notion that Sartre’s fiction was indeed *nikutai bungaku*, that it was erotic/pornographic, consumed with issues of sex and carnality. He is driven to overstate the case here because the opposite (mis)understanding was so firmly in place.

That is to say, Sartre’s fiction was not widely translated in Japan until the late 1940s; when it became available it gained (or re-gained) wide attention. Sartre was thus first known to the Japanese readership as a writer of fiction and only subsequently as a philosopher. The fact that we can speak of “two” Sartres, the philosopher and the writer of fiction, has important implications for the chronology that I am plotting in this study.⁴² Thus “when we move to discuss the late 1950s and 1960s there are writers [such as Ōe Kenzaburō and Kurahashi Yumiko] who are motivated into literary activity by their own study of Sartre” in contrast to Noma Hiroshi and others who had only imperfect access to Sartre’s work and no access to the philosophical works (Tsuge, “Jitsuzonshugi” 144). The differences of accessibility and therefore of understanding that was possible for Noma Hiroshi when

⁴²Nakazawa Ken’ichi, in a much more recent context (1995), explores these “two” Sartres, noting that: “The Sartre that strikes me as the most important these days, more than the Sartre who wrote philosophical works such as *Being and Nothingness* and *Existentialism and Humanism*, is Sartre the autobiographer, Sartre the novelist” (265-266).

he first published in 1946 and that of, say, Ōe Kenzaburō, first published in 1958, are great indeed. The point here is that this marks a significant break between a generation with virtually unlimited access to the works of Sartre, and the incomplete access of Noma's generation, for example.

When it later became clear that Sartre was a committed public intellectual, this also had great appeal to Japanese writers and intellectuals, themselves part of a strong awareness and lineage of the writer as social commentator and critic. Thus his public stance provided a model for the intellectuals struggling to find their own role in the postwar years.

The literature of Jean-Paul Sartre came to Japan at the bleakest of moments, during the postwar disillusion. When Edith Kern writes that "according to modern existentialist thinkers, the paradox and absurdity of life can be more readily deduced from fundamental human situations portrayed in fiction than described in the logical language of philosophy which is our heritage" (vii), she identifies the appeal of European existentialism in postwar Japan. More precisely, this also explains, I believe, some of Sartre's popularity in Japan: he was neither simply a philosopher nor simply a writer, he was both. As social critic and public intellectual he conformed to the ideal of the Japanese intellectual. Katō Shūichi, for one, has written of this issue,

The early postwar period might well have been termed the "age of intellectuals" in Japan. During the early postwar years, an intellectual was seen as a person who could embrace any and all issues; intellectuals were considered to be thinkers who were prepared to provide general guidelines to society.

Intellectuals were not confined to any particular field but were, in fact, expected to cope with the whole range of important problems of the time. ("Mechanisms" 249-250)

Sartre took on this role as well; he was publicly invested in societal issues, writing public essays as well as highly acclaimed fiction and philosophy. Political and philosophical issues addressed in the essays also find voice in his fiction. The same is true for many Japanese writers, including the three I will discuss in subsequent chapters. His depictions of the human condition through fiction attracted Japanese writers and intellectuals who were themselves struggling to be engaged and involved in society.⁴³

II. Existentialism, the Body, and Postwar Japanese Literature

The postwar period's emphasis on the physical and the carnal formed the immediate backdrop for the reception of Sartre's fiction. Postwar Japanese readers found in Sartre's fiction a "discourse of the body." Because Sartre's fiction--and therefore to many existentialism--was taken as synonymous with physicality and the literature of the body, it is appropriate to explore what is meant by a discourse on the body. This is to simultaneously explore one of the central postwar issues. To speak of a discourse of the body is to participate in a discussion that has gained renewed

⁴³For one recent discussion of the plight of Japanese intellectuals, the sense of ineffectiveness that could be said to afflict them and give rise to the sort of impotence in the face of commitment that Sartre addresses, see Kamiya Tadataka as well as, in English, Arima Tatsuo and Andrew Barshay. When Sartre visited Japan in 1966 he spoke harshly of intellectuals, disparaging their lack of commitment, reaffirming his relevance to the role of the intellectual. This series of lectures prompted much discussion; see the roundtable discussion chaired by Katō Shūichi. The three lectures delivered by Sartre are collected in *Plaidoyer pour les intellectuels*.

attention in Western scholarship. The oft-quoted paragraph of Michel Foucault reminds us that this is no new discussion:

Historians long ago began to write the history of the body. They have studied the body in the field of historical demography or pathology . . . [etc.] But the body is also directly involved in a political field; power relations have an immediate hold upon it; they invest it, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies. (25)

It is in the sense of this latter sentence, the body and its direct relation to the political, that the body becomes important in the postwar Japanese context. The body and our conceptions of the body are dependent on and formed by a particular political situation and cultural conception of society, by ideology.⁴⁴ This is the connection that was

⁴⁴Alice Jardine provides a succinct synopsis of the term “ideology” that is useful to this discussion:

By “Ideology,” I do not mean here the everyday sense of the term—one ideology as opposed to another; capitalist versus communist ideology, etc. I will remain in fact hopelessly Althusserian on just this one point and invoke his now infamous definition of ideology as “the ‘representation’ of the Imaginary relationship of individuals to the Real conditions of existence” (Althusser 162). Through this definition, I would insist upon ideology as the conceptual glue of culture, that which makes culture seem natural, that which holds any cultural system together, that which, in fact, makes any system of relationships appear natural. (84-85)

The “conceptual glue” against which these writers are reacting is the propaganda spearheaded by the State normalizing a “spiritual” commitment at the expense of the physical for the cause of the war.

acutely felt in postwar Japan by writers like Tamura Taijirō and Sakaguchi Ango. It is a connection that is also highlighted in the fiction of Noma Hiroshi. “Ideology” in this context refers directly to the state for in all this the body was consciously and unequivocally placed in opposition to that state and its appropriation of information. Tamura Taijirō makes this connection most explicitly. It is in this sense that the body is related to ideology, the unconscious mechanisms of the state (to invoke Althusser); and it is precisely by emphasizing the body that the writers of the immediate postwar are registering a protest to that ideology.

The “modern histories of the body” that have come since Foucault have also stressed the connection between concerns of the body and authoritarian governments.⁴⁵ “Modern histories of the body originated during the same era as the high point of European Fascism. The 1930s and 1940s saw an intense focus in many of the social issues which fed into historical enquiry on the social functions of the human body” (Outram 7). Outram goes on to discuss how manipulation of bodies is a

⁴⁵“Modern histories of the body” have also been plotted in Japanese historical scholarship. In but one example, Hotate Michihisa’s 1986 work entitled *Love and Subordination in the Middle Ages (Chūsei no naka no ai to jūzoku)*, with its intriguing subtitle, *The Body in Picture Scrolls (Emaki no naka no nikutai)* cites Claude Levi-Strauss and Marc Bloch before discussing the “estrangement of the body” (*nikutai no sogai*) and “the thinking of the body” (*nikutai no shikō*) he finds in medieval *emaki*. While this last phrase sounds like that of Sakaguchi Ango, discussed in this context below, Hotate relates it to Levi-Strauss’s *The Savage Mind*, which in Japanese is *Yasei no shiko*.

particularly fascist enterprise and concern.⁴⁶ While Outram mentions Nazi Germany explicitly, the fascist direction taken by Japan is also part of this rubric.⁴⁷ I am aware of the problems of using the term fascist in this context. For example, Woolf has it:

Historically speaking, fascism was originally understood to describe both an ideology and a particular political--and, to some extent, cultural, economic and social--system of a specific geographical area in a delimited period of time--Europe between the wars. It is open to discussion whether the Japanese regime of the 1930s . . . can, strictly speaking, be described as fascist. The word, unfortunately, has certain commode-like tendencies--the more you stuff into it, the more it takes. But there can be no doubt about the correctness of its usage in the interwar period in Europe. (1)

I am employing the term as it is widely used in Japanese scholarship, roughly synonymous with the authoritarian or repressive wartime government. For example, Maruyama Masao in his classic study, considers 1936-1945, i.e. the war years, to be the consummation period of Japanese fascism (see, especially, "The Ideology and Dynamics of Japanese Fascism" 24-83; see also Barshay xvi-xx). The contrast of ideology and fascism is especially potent where the concept of ideology, as here, overlaps with the idea of a "cultural glue." This comes into play in another important

⁴⁶For a fascinating, although disturbing exploration of this topic, see the study of fascist German literature by Klaus Theweleit.

⁴⁷See, for example, Peter Duus, especially the photographs on pages xxviii and xxx that remind this reader, at least, of mass demonstrations and exhibitions of the sort associated with Nazi and fascist regimes.

discussion of fascism that bears on this discussion, that by Zeev Sternhall in the introduction to his study of fascism:

This book is based on two assumptions. The first is that fascism, before it became a political force, was a cultural phenomenon. The growth of fascism would not have been possible without the revolt against Enlightenment and the French Revolution which swept across Europe at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth. . . . The second assumption, which follows from the first, is that in the development of fascism, its conceptual framework played a role of special importance. There can be no doubt that the crystallization of ideology preceded the buildup of political power and laid the groundwork for political action. (3)

In early eras (18th century France, for example) the King's body symbolized the State, thus treason was an offense against the King's body and punishment for treason was excruciatingly physical, as in the detailed description of a man being drawn and quartered (however badly) which begins Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*. Treason was a physical offense against a physical body, a transgression against the king, thereby the appropriate punishment was also to be physical. Whereas, in the 1930s and 1940s,

The body had become the prime area of the public gesture, as well as the prime location where the exercise of political control was demonstrated. At the same time increased state intervention in nutrition, in medical provision, in food planning, and in population planning of all kinds also emphasized an idea of the body as an area where spiritual values were absent and the conjunction of political and physical management was dominant. Very visibly, emphasis shifted from the body as the arena of *self*-control, which the nineteenth century had stressed, to the body as an arena where the sovereignty either of a mass

politic or a mass culture was made manifest. . . . More and more, governments managed bodies *en masse* [in the 1940s]. . . . The *univers concentrationnaire* ensured that all bodies became disposable, the rationale for their disappearance a fantasy of the state. (Outram 8)

This was as true in Japan as it was in Europe. For Japanese writers and thinkers, the body as disposable object was intimated in the prewar years, in the grand treason trial of 1910, in the death by torture of Kobayashi Takiji in 1933, in the mass arrests and imprisonments of leftists and free thinkers throughout the thirties, and finally by death on the battlefield during the war years. This is the fascist sort of state that the Japanese writers are reacting to, this is the State referred to by “ideology” in the postwar context, the State that actively managed culture to support the war. For Maruyama Masao the contradictions are economic and structural: “The stress on ‘idealism’ and ‘spirituality’ as against materialism in the fascist ideology [of Japan’s wartime government] signifies in reality an attempt to divert the eyes of the people from the fundamental contradictions of the social structure” (“The Ideology and dynamics of Japanese Fascism” 35-36), but Tamura Taijirō, Sakaguchi Ango, and others were responding to the same attempt by the State to divert attention from the material, the physical body, and focus on the insubstantial and ideological.

This postwar discourse on the body and physicality to which I refer was known in Japan as “literature of the body” (*nikutai bungaku*). It is usually tied to the appearance of Tamura Taijirō’s “*Nikutai no akuma*” (“Devil of the Flesh”),⁴⁸ in the

⁴⁸There is no discernible connection, but it seems suggestive that the translation of Raymond Radiguet’s *Le diable au corps* by Shinjō Yoshiakira into Japanese bears this same title--*Nikutai no akuma*--in 1954 (Tokyo: Shinchōsha). Mishima Yukio, whose work I take up in chapter 5, was greatly enamored with Radiguet’s novel and the

October 1946 issue of *Sekai bunka* , and “Nikutai no mon” in the March 1947 issue of *Gunzō*. These works gave explicit primacy to issues of the physical body. We find they also represent a conscious reaction to the increasing militarization and ideologicalization of the populace that began in the 1930s, extended through the Pacific war, and only came to an end in 1945.

It was a discourse pervasive at the time. There was even a journal, short-lived, that began publication in 1947 called *Nikutai*. The name connects it with this discussion and interest in the carnal body. The editorial board made explicit its desire to participate in the move “back” to something more fundamental in Japanese culture, a physicality they felt had been lost to an over-spiritualization and insubstantiality of precisely the variety we will hear Tamura Taijirō expound. While this journal ran for only four issues it featured the writers and topics discussed here: the premier volume carried Sakaguchi Ango’s work “Sakura no mori no mankai no shita” and also Hino Ashihei’s “Haikyo”. Volume two was devoted to the poetry of Rimbaud and the third was a special issue devoted to “literature and the body” (*bungaku to nikutai*).

The body as *nikutai* is placed in conscious opposition to the spiritual quality of the *seishin*. The meanings of *seishin* resonate with an individual’s personality, the unsubstantial aspect of the individual that makes one what they are. *Kōjien* gives as

affinities to *Confessions of a Mask* are marked. Running through all of these novels is a obsessive fascination with the body of a woman. There is also horror of the erotic object that functions in tandem with the fascination and obsession of that body, all of which draws these three works together to suggest a reading through the work of George Bataille. Mishima suggests the appropriateness of such a reading in his *taidan* with Nosaka Akiyuki, where he remarks on the interest he has in Bataille’s writings (110-112).

part of the initial definition of this term, “in contrast to matter, body (*nikutai*)” (Shinmura 1416). One can also say things in Japanese like *jidai no seishin*, to refer to “the spirit of the age,” which is a personality of sorts that transgresses any individual and is true of the whole, a “national consciousness” perhaps. It is a way to downplay the individual and place emphasis on the group. It was also a term used with numbing frequency in wartime propagandist clichés such as *gunkoku seishin*, “the spirit of the military nation” or *kōkoku seishin*, the spirit of the imperial nation” (Chou 42). It is precisely this reference to the undifferentiated mass that writers like Tamura and Ango were resisting in order to emphasize and glorify the individual. It seems important to note as well that this interest in carnality or decadence was not an excuse to write pornography or erotica (as it was often understood and may first appear). Rather, it was an attempt to restore dignity to the individual. It was a way to speak of individuals, or groups of individuals who follow their instincts and are nearly primitive but live according to their own rules and are thereby preserving their humanity. It eschews the ideology of Japanese “society” that dealt in spiritual and intellectual abstractions and was responsible for the disastrous war. It was a way to stress the freedom and autonomy of the individual that these writers felt had been trampled during the war years. These writers felt that the Japanese had been denied their physicality and thereby their individuality, their particularity, and they proposed this focus on the physical as a remedy to restore that individuality.

The government’s call to subsume individual needs and desires to the goals of the state (in this case military conquest and expansion) had become increasingly strident as the military conflict and expansion of the 1930s and 1940s progressed. As the nation was mobilized the populace was exhorted and eventually hounded to give their all for a war effort that grew increasingly desperate. Given the dehumanization implicit in this tendency, it is perhaps no surprise that there was a postwar backlash.

At the end of that war writers such as Tamura Taijirō and Sakaguchi Ango began to call for a focus on individual desires and a turning away from corporate national goals. The disillusionment and cynicism in response to the defeat and the postwar years--in many ways the even more desperate day-to-day existence of those years--prompted many to reject the nation's calls for selfless sacrifice and conversely to revel in individual goals and desires. This is the situation Tsurumi Shunsuke and Kuno Osamu regard as the *tenkō* experience, and thus comprising an existentialist experience. It was as if people had been pushed far enough, said "forget it", and went on to pursue only their own needs and desires. The contemporary literature reflects this. The literature in this vein also represents a reaction to what Tamura and others considered an over-emphasis on the spiritual and abstract in Japanese literature and culture up to that time. Sakaguchi Ango, Noma Hiroshi, and Tamura Taijirō are writers of this sort and will be discussed below. Many other writers could be profitably included for discussion: Shiina Rinzō, Umezaki Haruo, Takeda Taijun, Haniya Yutaka, and others who, along with Noma Hiroshi make up the so-called "first coterie of postwar writers" (*daiichi sengo ha*).⁴⁹ It is my contention that the concept of the body resulting from this situation is one of the major constructs, especially as it intersects with existentialist concerns, underlying the literature of this period.

⁴⁹According to the *Gendai Nihon bungaku daijiten*, Noma Hiroshi, Umezaki Haruo, Shiina Rinzo, Nakamura Shin'ichirō, *et al.*, make up the "first [wave] of new postwar writers", and Hotta Yoshie and Abe Kōbō, among others, make up the second wave. The third wave (*daisan no shinjin*) are perhaps most often referred to as a group, and includes such writers as Yasuoka Shōtarō, Yoshiyuki Junnosuke, Kojima Nobuo, Onuma Tan, Shōno Junzō, and Endō Shūsaku (Hisamatsu 635).

To speak of the body in late 1940s Japan is to focus on two separate but related concerns that constantly appear and reappear. One body is the flesh-and-blood body, the body of muscle and blood that fights, struggles and bleeds, that survives and dies. This is the body as soldier's body and is well-represented in the fiction of the first coterie writers. These works often showcase a soldier who has experienced the horrors and deprivations of the battlefield only to return and experience the horrors and deprivations of postwar Japan. Deprivations of basic human requirements--food, water, shelter--cause characters to focus on the their bodies and its needs. These bodies are only, and entirely, physical. In a chronicle of survival (I think of concentration camp literature, Alexandr Solzhenitsyn's for example) thoughts are filled with fingers and toes, mouths and stomachs. These works show a similar aesthetic, if it can be called that, that simultaneously discounts and denies the ideological and cerebral. It is a tendency and concern that is so strong and pervasive that it remains a palpable foundation in the next generations of writers like Ōe and Mishima, as I shall discuss. These writers were too young to serve as soldiers but not too young to have experienced the war and its aftermath. The physicality that is an emblematic, measurably new quality in the fiction of this period persists in the writing of those who were in elementary school during the war years. Even if they were not soldiers the discourse established by those soldier-writers persisted into a later time.

Ideology is never nonexistent, and behind this concept of body is an ideological conception of the body, a philosophical construction that in many ways precursors the above conception of body. That is, an "ideology" inevitably develops, even in an explicit attempt such as Tamura's to discredit all ideology. It is this conception of the body, this opposition, that informs and determines the literature of the body, of the *nikutai*. "Body" in this discourse corresponds to a term that was

gaining new currency in postwar Japan, *nikutai*.⁵⁰ *Nikutai* gained new relevance in the postwar era to signify the expressly carnal. It is a postwar usage, *karada*, or *shintai*, being the terms most likely employed for "body" in prewar speech. Iwaya Daishi recalls *nikutai* being a loaded term (*gokan*) in the postwar years, noting further that "before the war we would not have used *nikutai* but *shintai* [when referring to the body]" (qtd. in Okuno, "Tamura Taijiro" 250). The Japanese word *shintai* also represents "body" but occurs more often in philosophical discourse. The term *shintai* is preferred by phenomenologists and has more of a philosophical nuance (hence Tsuge's gloss of *nikutai* with *shintai* that we encountered above).⁵¹ The distinction arises in the overtones of baseness and carnality that *nikutai* incorporates, contrasting to the clinical dispassionate use by philosophers.

⁵⁰In that sense, the consideration of the body in this study conforms to a need felt by Caroline Bynum when she echoes the exasperation of a friend who laments: "There's so much written about the body . . . but it all focuses on such a recent period. And in so much of it, the body dissolves into language. The body that eats, that works, that dies, that is afraid--that body just isn't there" (1). The body "that eats, that works, that dies, that is afraid": this is precisely the body of interest to postwar Japanese intellectuals, and the writers under discussion here.

⁵¹Thus, "Now, to mention discourse on the body (*nikutairon*), I was recently quite surprised when I went to a bookstore that stocks technical works and found quite a few works discussing the body (*shintairon*) and sexuality (*seiairon*) from a phenomenological and structuralist framework" (Hotate 257). This is the sense employed by Katō Norihiko in his recent book *Nihon to iu shintai*. See as well the work by Niino Naoyoshi and Miyake Gōichi.

A similar sort of distinction is made in French and exploited by Sartre. Of the two possible terms for body, *le corps* roughly corresponds to the clinical nuances of *shintai* as used in philosophical discourse. The corresponding term for “flesh” or *nikutai* is *le chair*. This distinction is born out in *Being and Nothingness* where Sartre takes up “Concrete Relations with Others”: “But this body which I wish to appropriate, I wish to appropriate as *flesh* (389) or, in French, “Mais ce corps que je veux m’appropriier, je veux me l’appropriier *comme chair*” (458; italics added). The desire to appropriate a body as flesh will resonate with desires expressed in Noma’s fiction. When the dictionary reminds me of the close association between *le corps* and *cadavre* the associative train of thought extends to Ōe’s fiction where cadavers form an important contrast to living bodies in order to contrast precisely this point.

In this period of Japanese history, especially in wartime talk and propaganda, it was the individual body (*nikutai*) that was set in opposition to the national body (*kokutai*, usually rendered as “national polity”). There is a great wealth of material concerning the term, and the concept, of the *kokutai*. George Wilson reflects much that energizes the idea as I am referring to it, after noting that in the Tokugawa period it was the *realm* that was holy; the Meiji Restoration signaled its downfall for after this the realm had to be replaced by the nation-state. It is now the nation-state that had political power but could never attain the moral authority of the realm, much as it might wish to. Thus,

When twentieth-century Japanese “ultranationalists” championed the *kokutai*, they were nostalgically harking back to the notion of the realm. Its function was central and it was “religious” in character, so it is appropriate to the sense of metaphor to follow George Elison in translating *kokutai* not as “national polity” but as “the mystical body of Japan.” (42)

The *kokutai* becomes something of a state religion with the emperor at the apex, taking on mystical elements. The *kokutai* became a particularly formidable edifice that brooked no dissent in the war years. Tsurumi Shunsuke, in a more political approach writes,

The concept of *kokutai* or “national structure” derived from the fundamental insularity and isolation of the Japanese. The concept served as a powerful linguistic weapon both for attack and defense in the political arena of the period 1931-1945. Although the expression “national structure” disappeared with Japan’s defeat in 1945 and a new style of political argument was initiated by the United States occupation, the concept, if not the term, is still alive in a submerged form in Japanese politics. (23)⁵²

He goes on to note that “After the Meiji Restoration, ‘national structure’ was used to signify the uniqueness of the existing government of Japan” (Tsurumi 23). That is, not only is *kokutai* synonymous with government but it is an all-pervasive idea that even if submerged, persists in postwar society. This all-pervasive normalizing force that was (and is) the *kokutai* was established *vis-à-vis* and opposed to the individual body, which was severely punished for any dissent. Thus,

After the defeat, and after the Emperor’s proclamation that he was only a human being, the idea of national structure also fell off like another layer of dandruff.

Then all that finally remained was the body (*nikutai*). This was the basis of what

⁵²Tsurumi goes on to give an historical account of the origins of the term; see especially pp. 23-32. I refer the reader also to Carol Gluck’s extended discussion of this process in *Japan’s Modern Myths*.

was called “bodyism” (*nikutai bungaku*)⁵³, rampant in the period after the war and persisting in various forms to this day. To be true to the needs of the body was proclaimed the supreme aim in the postwar literature of Sakaguchi Ango, Tamura Taijirō and Tanaka Hidemitsu. (Tsurumi 31-32).

The Japanese provides an obvious linguistic and graphic contrast for these terms: the physical *body* against the national *body* (*nikutai* opposes *kokutai*). The individual body (civilian, soldier) is suppressed and repressed for the cause of the national body; the individual's concerns are subsumed to the concerns of the greater, the national body. The individual body that had until now been repressed and taken advantage of, suppressed for the ideological needs of an abstract, national, body, reacted by glorifying the physical body. Individual concerns and needs become central and the national body is scoffed at. This is the body, the *nikutai*. I am interested in here. The intentional opposition of individual body to corporate/national body is of special interest here and gives this discourse a particular potency.

Existentialism as a Discourse on the Body

Again, the war years form the historical moment when this dialectical sense was the strongest, and is also the moment in which Sartre's fiction was received in Japan. That fiction was taken to represent existentialism and existentialism began to be read as a literature of the body. The postwar Japanese understanding of Sartre

⁵³According to the preface, this work was prepared in English and later translated into Japanese. The words in brackets are those that appear in the Japanese text. This is especially critical in that “bodyism”, a non-Japanese construction, becomes *nikutai bungaku* in the Japanese version, corresponding exactly to my discussion here.

while perhaps not orthodox is nonetheless understandable when the historic moment is recreated. With this construct in mind we find in the fiction of Sartre an overwhelming concern for the physical body. It is worth reminding ourselves at this point of the physicality within Sartre's worldview. Again, Japanese readers of the late 1940s were especially struck with this aspect of Sartre's fiction for these were the very issues that plagued them, as is registered, for example, in Sakaguchi Ango's response to the story "Intimacy", quoted below. This reading of Sartre as participating in a discourse on the body established the initial interest in his work in Japan. It is also worth noting again that this reception to Sartre's work seems different from that of any other country. Sartre's paradigm was making itself known at this time and, as if to support its value by anticipating it, the works I will discuss in subsequent chapters will appear particularly Sartrean. Stated another way, the initial reading of Sartre in Japanese is unorthodox in the Western tradition, but certainly supportable and legitimate.

The Japanese reading of bodiliness in Sartre is entirely appropriate, although this is not where non-Japanese commentators usually begin their discussion. In particular, given that Japanese awareness of Sartre was by-and-large via the fiction, contemporary writers understood Sartre to be participating in the same nexus of issues that they were. Noma's contemporaries read Sartre's short fiction and felt it belonged to the same "literature of the body" that took up their most pressing issues. Their reading of the body corresponds to Sartre's in which, stated rudely and summarily, consciousness proceeds from an awareness of the body as thing, as physical object. In order to assert the humanity that is consciousness, and in order to be more than object, that is, to assert an individual consciousness which will separate this object (that is a body) from inkwells or cucumbers, that body must be moved, given human roles. It is not long then until one encounters another body. Causing this physical

entity known as the body to move is the first step to asserting will and consciousness: it is the primary step towards establishing the pattern, the role, by which the Other recognizes and knows one. This Other brings with it the Gaze, crucial for identity but threatening as Hell (to paraphrase Sartre). Or, as we have it in *Being and Nothingness*:

As I appear to the Other, so I am. Moreover since the Other is such as he appears to me and since my being depends on the Other, the way in which I appear--that is, the moment of the development of my self-consciousness--depends on the way in which the Other appears to me. . . . In this sense to the extent that the Other apprehends me as bound to a body and immersed in *life*, I am myself only an *Other*. In order to make myself recognized by the Other, I must risk my own life. To risk one's life, in fact, is to reveal oneself as not-bound to the objective form or to any determined existence--as not-bound to life.

(*Being and Nothingness* 237)

I introduce this to the discussion here because these philosophical concepts are subsumed in the fiction by which Sartre was first known in Japan.

The bodiliness of Sartre may in fact have been downplayed in Western discussions for one finds, in the context of this study, a provocative paragraph in Hazel Barnes' introduction to her translation of *Being and Nothingness* where she notes how basic the body is to Sartre's philosophy:

Two other psychological positions, original, I believe, with Sartre, are of particular importance in connection with his views on the For-itself's relation with other people--the For-Others. These are his ideas about the nature of the body and sexuality. In one sense, of course, the body represents man's facticity, his Being-there in the world. It determines certain physical limits to what the For-itself can do within or to the world. . . . Without a body the For-

itself could have no relation whatsoever with what we call the world. . . . The For-itself does not *have* senses. It is present to the world *through* the senses, and the world spatially has meaning only with the body as center of reference.

(xxxix)

She calls attention the central position that the body holds in Sartre's thought; it would seem that the Japanese readers understood this aspect from the beginning.

The body is indeed a central concern in the work of Sartre. The philosophical conception is represented in fiction such as "Intimacy" in quite vivid and graphic terms, underscoring a sentence from Barnes quoted earlier, "While the body is that through which the Look is experienced, it is sexuality which just as much as in Freudian psychology--though in a far different way--lies at the origin of all human relations" (xli). When his work was read in Japan amidst the bleak backdrop of the postwar years and its deprivations it was the physical aspect more than any other that struck the Japanese readers. In Sartre's fiction as well the body "lies at the origin of all human relations." It was through this construct of and concern for the body that Sartre's work was first received in Japan. To speak more precisely, Sartre's short stories (particularly "Intimacy") were read with great interest at the time of their introduction in Japan, and read as a way of treating and dealing with this concept of body that concerned contemporary Japanese writers. Okuno Takeo is another who makes explicit that this concern coincided with Sartre at that time:

It was the trend of the times in literary and philosophical circles immediately after the war and continuing right up to the present [1968], to emphasize along with social revolution and humanism the importance of the carnal (*nikutai*) in people and freedom in sex as a reaction to the suppression against [depictions of] extreme sexuality (*kyokutan no sei*). Even the works of Sartre were brought in and introduced as *nikutai no bungaku*. In fact, the populace (*shomin*) were

courageous in their practice of sexual liberty. Various pronouncements were insisted upon in those times, but it is surprising just how extreme in their idealization of sexual liberty and the importance of the *nikutai* were writers and thinkers. (“Tamura Taijirō” 250)

Okuno reflects that this postwar emphasis on physicality persisted through the 1960s, that this emphasis on the carnal as exemplified by writers like Ango and Tamura is of a piece with the emphasis on sexual liberty and the discontent with established society. He goes on to make explicit the connection between this carnal literature and the work of later writers when he writes,

[Tamura Taijirō] was well aware of the complete reaction of the *nikutai* to the postwar disruption. This awareness was accurate and his persistent claims concerning the *nikutai* and the *seishin*, as well as the reaction against the contemporary mechanized world were followed up by spirited writers such as Mishima Yukio, Ishihara Shintarō, . . . Ōe Kenzaburō, . . . and continues down to the present.” (“Tamura Taijirō” 252)

That is, the reaction set in place after the war by Tamura’s work, for one, had not yet depleted in the late 1960s. It is a reaction, anti-establishment in tone, that continued in contemporary writers such as Ōe and Mishima who were at the height of their popularity when Okuno wrote this recollection. The anti-establishment stance is further evident by the strength of the reaction against it. This carnal literature was seen to be so pervasive that all of society’s ills were attributed to the appearance of this new carnality. All the decadence and evil of the time was regularly blamed on *nikutai bungaku*, as suggested by the reaction of Maruyama Masao, noted above. This is yet

another way in which it mirrors postwar existentialism in France, being denounced as the movement that embodies decadence and all that is wrong with society⁵⁴:

And so while we can talk about the ‘*nikutai* boom’ of those [postwar] years there was also serious criticism from the level-headed in society (*seken no ryōshiki*). Any sort of decadent behavior or evil was attributed to *nikutai bungaku* so that even when Dazai Osamu—who wrote hardly anything that qualifies as *nikutai bungaku*--committed suicide in 1948, it was referred to as “The dead end of a writer of *nikutai*” in a contemptuous cartoon printed in *Akahata* [the Communist Party Organ, *Red Flag*]. (“Tamura Taijirō” 253)

These complementary constructs of the body and of the Self/Other were at work in the Japanese literary context, and the writers discussed here are exemplary of this. Thus, “Of the postwar writers who made an issue of existentialism, there are, heading that list, those who described the postwar situation in terms of the body, Oda Sakunosuke, Sakaguchi Ango, and Tamura Taijirō” (Tsuge, “Jitsuzonshugi” 132). Thus, while one may speak of despair and absurdity, anxiety and *angst* as the emotions of existentialism, in this literature they are rooted in a concern for the corporeality of the body. Concerns of individual responsibility and the proper ground for action are existentialist concerns, but they are consistently brought back to be rooted in the body. This aspect of Sartre’s work gained much greater emphasis in Japan than in the West. It is a philosophical paradigm comprised of and demanding, almost literally, a visceral response and understanding. It was this physicality in his fiction that first attracted the attention of Japanese writers.

⁵⁴This is documented in the biography of Sartre by Annie Cohen-Solal (260-267), and also in the video, *Sartre by Himself*, part II fascinating for the contemporary commentary and footage that accompanies this point.

Ibuki Takehiko notes that an impetus to writing his 1947 article is that an overview of Sartre's worldview (*sekaikan*) is in order. He feels that first there are two misconceptions to be righted: 1) Sartre's works in question are not properly "postwar" as they appeared prewar in France. It is only that they have not appeared in translation in Japan until after the war; and 2) "because sexual scenes are forefronted from time to time in 'Intimacy', Existentialism is considered to be sexual exposition in literature" ("Sarutoru no sekaikan" 2-3). The point again being that, and popularly, Existentialism was understood to be represented in the fiction, not the philosophy, of Sartre, and that fiction was regarded by many as a carnal literature of sexual explicitness. It was a common misconception. In Japan it was the work of Tamura Taijirō and Sakaguchi Ango that laid the foundation for that reception.

III. Sakaguchi Ango and Tamura Taijirō

We find explicit the connection between Sartre's translated stories, Existentialism, and the "literature of the body" in essays of Sakaguchi Ango. Ango, himself an iconoclastic writer whose work is graphic and decidedly physical, is palpably inspired by Sartre's work. Ango--although, or because, he professes no philosophic interest or understanding--read Sartre's "Intimacy" very much in the vein of *nikutai bungaku*. For example, he wrote about the story shortly after its Japanese appearance that

["Intimacy"] does not preach one moral word. It is, simply, the *nikutai* which thinks, the *nikutai* which tells the story. Lulu's body, strangely enough, loves the body of an impotent man. Through the words of her body the story is told.

In ethics we have come to think of the spirit thinking through the body, but people have forgotten that the *nikutai* itself thinks and speaks. People don't know this. They've never thought about it.

Sartre attempts, in "Intimacy," to narrate thoroughly and completely through the thoughts of the *nikutai* itself. At first glance this is nonsensical, but in fact it is a wisdom beyond sense, and this is its revolutionary meaning. ("Nikutai jitai ga shikō suru" 239)⁵⁵

The affinities that Ango finds in Sartre are myriad. The individual in an antagonistic stance against the "ethics" of society, its rules and regulations, is the Ango stance. His most famous essay is titled "On Decadence" ("Darakuron") and is a spirited call to "return to decadence" by which he means a return to the roots of humanity, casting off the trappings of artificial society. Sakaguchi Ango is very much part of this discourse as one who "fired away (*uchidasu*) with the motif of the *nikutai*'s thinking" (Okuno, "Tamura Taijirō" 250) in his early works, namely "Darakuron" in 1946 as well as the subsequent publication of "Hakuchi". While Tamura's work was the most closely associated with the discourse on the body, Sakaguchi Ango is also very much a part of this discussion (cf. Mori 235-240).

⁵⁵I am struck by how this rhetoric resonates with words of Mishima, who I will argue shares this interest in the physical as expressed by the *nikutai*, when he writes:

The liberation of the body in postwar Japan manifested itself principally in the aspect of sex; its other aspect, that of the effect it might have upon our moral history, never came to the surface, never reached our awareness, never received serious consideration. Except for this sexual aspect, the same dark, ancient, Confucianistic contempt for the flesh still lurked in various forms in our awareness, never received serious consideration. (Introduction vii)

Also, Ango's protestations in the above essay that he is not at all familiar with Sartre's writing notwithstanding, there is ample overlap of theme to suggest the contrary. Tsuge hones in on a phrase from Ango's essay, "Watakushi no shōsetsu." in which Ango writes:

Freedom presupposes passing through the gates of Hell, it presupposes that one has been placed in the midst of anxiety, agonies, pain, suffering, and lamentations, because everything has been placed on one's own shoulders. Thus, even when people discover the greatest of barriers and constraints to freedom, they are in the midst of freedom. Freedom makes its home in the midst of Hell, it is always filled with the sadness that results from the inability to ever reach Heaven. (qtd. in Tsuge, "Nichijō to hinichijō no hazama" 142)

This sounds uncannily like Sartre's famous pronouncement that we are condemned to freedom. "The point to be made here is that Ango, from a very early stage, was able to appropriate Sartre's writings for his own needs (*jikayakurōchu*) (Tsuge, "Nichijō to hinichijō no hazama" 142).

In Ango's fiction as well one finds the call to return to an authentic humanity by an emphasis on the physical. For example, the first paragraph of "The Idiot" ("Hakuchi") reads,

Various species lived in the house; human beings, a pig, a dog, a hen, a duck. But actually there was hardly any difference between their style of lodging or in the food they ate. It was a crooked building like a storehouse. The owner and his wife lived on the ground floor, while a mother and her pregnant daughter rented the attic. The daughter was pregnant, but no one knew who was responsible. (384)⁵⁶

⁵⁶Unless specified otherwise all translations of this story are by George Saitō.

This is where humans are of a species not unlike a pig, a dog, a duck. This is a story that explores that fine line between man and beast, pushes at the line of separation. Like Ōe, Ango proposes that there is no substantial distinction. The idiot of the story is a mute woman. While she cannot speak she shows volition and desire. She is then more than animal, as is the narrator by contrast, but it is not clear to what degree different. The "human" aspect of physical needs and desires is nearly indistinguishable from the "animal", we know she is more "human" than animal, but it is difficult to discern why. She is a person, yet her desires are entirely physical, and her humanity is evidenced in her physicality. Her consciousness is hard to locate, nonetheless. In her basic desires we know she is closer to something basic and foundational in the human experience.

The story continues in this vein with descriptions of the inhabitants of this postwar neighborhood. We find they are all decidedly carnal, all of them live lives immoral by any prewar or wartime criteria. Placed in the immediate postwar context, the contrast would not have been lost on Ango's audience: none of the old rules hold any longer, the noble ideals of the spirit have been proven a sham. Daily life is one where the concerns of the flesh are foremost. Thus one of the women in the neighborhood is now pregnant but the father is not known. She had been given lodging in the neighborhood association's office, has subsequently slept with practically everyone in the office, and the result of the immoral act is visible to all. Her pregnancy is known in the way all things are now known, in "the flesh" by an expanding belly. Ango never fails to deal in ironic contradictions, pointing out the hypocrisy of the wartime ethos for the neighborhood association is the organization that oversaw all activities in a given neighborhood from food rationing to air raid drills and was to be the *de facto* government surveillance post. They were charged with carrying out government policies as well as reporting on their neighbors to preserve

order (this latter, however, rarely carried through with any consistency; see Tsurumi 89-90). Again, the office from which these policies were handed down is the very office in which she was impregnated.

Many of the tenements in the neighborhood are rented out to prostitutes and, “Since these women had no children and since they were all inclined to keep their rooms neat, the caretakers did not mind about the disorderliness and immorality of their private lives” (385). Nearby as well was a “soldier of fortune from Manchuria, who proudly boasted that his profession used to be murder” (386). All of these underscore a favorite Ango image, that below the order and upright appearance of society, especially during the war, is just this sort of decadence. Ango has called for a return to such decadence, a call echoed by Tamura Taijirō and others. The outward orderliness preferred by the State, a proper *seishin* to support the war effort leaves a carnal reality undisclosed. When the State’s order has been shown to be false the carnal reality reasserts itself. In this, as Ango, Tamura, and others insist, is the declaration of a true humanity.

Ango’s “Darakuron” (“On Decadence”) was published in 1946 and was immensely powerful. The first paragraph sets the tone:

Things have changed in the last half year. *I take my leave to humbly serve and shield our Sovereign Lord. If I should die at our Sovereign Lord’s side, I’ll have no regrets.* The young have all “scattered as the blossoms,” but they have also survived to become black marketers. *Now that you, whom I love, have left to shield our Sovereign Lord, I no longer wish to live a hundred years.* Within the space of half a year, the girls who sent off their men with such brave hearts, will have grown increasingly businesslike about the task of bowing before their husbands’ memorial tablets, and the day is not far off when their hearts will find room for the images of other faces. It is not that humans have changed.

Humans have been like this all along, and what has changed is only the outer layer of things. (1)⁵⁷

The noble wartime emotions are quickly forgotten for the timeless reality of humanity, its decadent self-centered nature. This, Ango stresses over and over again, is what has been lost in the wartime ideology with its emphasis on noble emotions. The ideology stressed humility and service to the Sovereign; those noble soldiers have now returned and are engaged in illegal black marketeering, a hypocrisy. The woman who have pledged themselves to their men, who have pledged to remain faithful to their patriotic husbands even should they become war widows, have quickly become business-like in their mourning. They have even taken to thinking of other partners. Ango's point is that this is how it should be, the State has been wrong in foisting onto the people these noble but essentially artificial and ethereal ideals, and so the natural carnal reaction should not be condemned but expected. Now is the time to return to decadence, by which he means liberation of the spirit, a return to physical humanity, not the sterile and false nobility preferred by the wartime ideology.

These are the same concerns that underlie the "literature of the body": a disgust and impatience with the artificial trappings of society, and in particular the manipulative state that has seduced and made a mockery of the individual by its abstractions, ideologies, and propaganda. In response is a celebration of the concrete and the physical. This argument aligns Ango firmly with those known as writers of *nikutai bungaku*. Ango is regularly discussed as a writer of *nikutai bungaku*, which

⁵⁷This translation is by Seiji M. Lippit. Italics represent archaic phrases reminiscent of the *Manyōshū*, a rhetorical style much in use during the war years that became a propagandistic style. As here, it was regularly invoked to inspire greater acts of self-sacrifice in the service of the State.

pairs him with Sartre and existentialism. Thus, the story “Hakuchi” is summarized this way in the *Nihon kindai bungaku daijiten*:

In “Hakuchi” the characters are placed in an aboriginal setting where there is no distinction made among humans and animals, and the carnal, instinctual pain and sadness of this mute woman with whom the protagonist tries to flee [the fire-bombing of the neighborhood] was expressed as existentialist fiction, and this marks the first foothold for postwar writers extending from the first postwar group [*daiichi sengo ha*; i.e. Noma Hiroshi, *et al.*], including the third group of new writers [*daisan no shinjin*; i.e. Abe Kobo *et al.*], to contemporary work by Kaiko [Takeshi] and Ōe [Kenzaburō].” (90)

This is another confirmation of the connection I am stressing here: the physicality and carnal concerns in Ango’s fiction mark a new direction in fiction. In it he discovered the method for existentialist description, a method that expresses a basic humanity, dependent on a consciousness of the carnal. Description, that is, of the sense and feeling pervasive of the postwar years, a feeling based on their war experiences, one that is decidedly physical. There is then a direct relationship between this style of existentialist fiction and the existentialist fiction of the subsequent generation of writers as well. The work of Ango, Tamura, and Noma set a stage and established themes incorporated in the work of Ōe Kenzaburō, Abe Kōbō and many others. There is an explicit connection between the *nikutai bungaku* of this period not only to existentialism, but to Ōe Kenzaburō’s fiction, as will be discussed in chapter 4.

Just as it takes more than a sense of *angst* or a questioning of responsibility to make a work existentialist, so too does it take more than an awareness of physicality to make it a “literature of the body”. Equally, just as there is unquestionably meaning in the term “existentialist” so too is there meaning in the term “literature of the body”, whatever points of contention might legitimately exist in attempting precise definitions.

The awareness that one finds in the Japanese fiction of the period is of a certain type, informed by the postwar experience and this genre of “literature of the body.” My discussion is bracketed by this “literature of the body” and by existentialist concerns in postwar Japan. The works I am discussing as “existentialist” share this concern for the body; more, and especially in the case of Noma Hiroshi’s fiction, display an existentialist sensibility before existentialist work was widely popular or even available in Japan. The carnality of the *nikutai* that is central in these works ties directly to the carnality that Japanese readers found in Sartre’s fiction when it did become available in the late 1940s. That is, work that in hindsight exhibits existentialist themes and sensibility arose independent of French influence. The works under discussion in this essay are particularly striking in their similarities to Sartre’s fictional worlds. We find many works of postwar Japanese fiction that read like existentialist fiction, indeed, that read like Sartrean fiction, before his work or worldview was widely known in Japan. This seems to suggest a similar response to war in two different national contexts, sharing, as they do, similar responses and doubts to wartime complicity and capitulation, for example.⁵⁸

Tamura Taijirō

The work of Tamura Taijirō is crucial to this study because he, more than anyone else, is associated with *nikutai bungaku*. Thus a few paragraphs about him and his work are in order.

Tamura Taijirō’s work is set in the immediate postwar landscape, the burned out landscape where the individual has been reduced to the most basic elements and

⁵⁸In many ways the similarities to the postwar German experience are even more striking. See, for example, the many relevant articles collected in Schlant and Rimer.

drives--food, water, shelter, sex. The contemporary reaction to his work was explosive. "It was simply amazing how Tamura Taijiro's "Nikutai no mon", appearing in the March 1947 issue of *Gunzo* sent shock waves not only through the literary establishment, but through the general readership as well" recounts Okuno Takeo, who goes on to note that the only other work to approach it in "societal repercussions" was Ishihara Shintaro's 1955 "Taiyo no kisetsu" ("Tamura Taijiro" 249). "Nikutai no mon" was staged in 1947 in a dramatization by Ozawa Fujio that also proved widely popular and broke numerous records. It was staged over 1,000 times, for example. (It was staged more than 700 times in 1947 alone). In book form it sold over 700,000 copies and has been made into numerous movie renditions, the first in 1948 directed by Makino Masahiro and the most recent in 1988, directed by Gosha Hideo (Mori 238; Okuno, "Tamura Taijiro" 249-250; Desser 320).⁵⁹ The popular appeal may be attributed to the erotic portrayals of the young women, especially in the more sensational theater and movie versions. This is supported by Okuno Takeo's recollection of seeing the dramatization in Shinjuku while still a student: "There still were no strip shows at that time. This play became notorious as 'sadistic theater' because of the scene [in which one of the prostitutes] is tied up and beaten" ("Tamura Taijiro" 249). Tamura himself claims surprise at this level of response when he wrote some years after the publishing the work:

It is odd for me to say this about this work of mine, but it called forth explosive reactions not only from literary critics but from society as a whole. I must say, I myself was quite surprised by the strength of this response. As I think back on it now, no one had made the pan-pan girls and their *milieu* (*seitai*) the subject of fiction until then. (*Waga bundan seishunki* 219)

⁵⁹See Desser 312-317 for a helpful discussion of the movie.

In a contemporary essay Tamura also explained his idealistic and philosophic goals when writing this story, writing that only by a "liberation of the bonds that constrict the body can we be truly free" ("Nikutai ga ningen de aru" 14). This is "a description of the pan-pan girls who, in the tumultuous postwar years, existed by using their bodies (*shintai*) as their sole business stock" (Mori 238). The point being that the body becomes central, and more properly, the *nikutai* has become central because it is a commodity. Further, the women have chosen, in this story, without remorse, to use their bodies as commodity. The power is in this freedom to choose their own lifestyle, it has not been decreed from above, in contrast to the constraints many felt.

The sympathy of the narrator is clearly with the "pan-pan" girls⁶⁰ and their almost aboriginal society replete with taboos, rituals, and social codes. Surviving is the determining feature of their lives and the story stresses with much animal imagery that they have developed this society to ensure survival. It is a primitive and physical society, where morals and other idealistic concerns have no place. The curious thing is that the work itself is much more satisfying and artistically complex than this sort of advance publicity would lead one to expect.

⁶⁰Kanda writes that the word "pan-pan girl" originated from the Indonesian "perempuan", the word for "girl" (Japanese transliteration being "puromupan"). In some dialects this can be construed to mean "one who sells/prostitutes oneself for bread (pan)" (58). Some notes that one of the most glaring historical flaws of Tamura's story is that the "pan-pan" girls of the time did not generally attract clients from among the ranks of the occupying servicemen, as Tamura has it, but from Japanese office workers, black marketers, and factory owners ("Kaisetsu" 242).

“*Nikutai no akuma*” (1946) was the initial postwar work of Tamura’s that brought him recognition and began his association with *nikutai bungaku*. This is a story of a mutual infatuation between a Japanese soldier stationed in China and a Chinese woman who is one of the prisoners of war that his garrison is to watch over. She never denounces her Communism nor lets go of her hatred of the Japanese. Nonetheless--and the narration is somewhat clumsy on this point--even given these mutual incompatibilities, she and the narrator share an undeniable intensity and desire for each other. This, one assumes, is the “devil of the flesh” of the title, the inexorable quality of the physical that cannot be overlooked and is denied only at one’s peril. It asserts itself even in the face of differing ideologies.

That, of course, as with “*Nikutai no mon*”, is precisely Tamura’s point, that the physical has been shunted and stifled, and now it is time to resurrect it, so that the Japanese may know a fuller humanity (*Waga bundan seishunki* 228-229). This story received praise from such contemporary figures as Masamune Hakuchō, Aono Suekichi, Yokomitsu Riichi, and Niwa Fumio (Sone, “*Kaisetsu*” 241). The enthusiastic contemporary response to Tamura’s work may also suggest that these fictional portrayals resonated with readers’ own experiences and feelings about the war and postwar years. This is only speculation on my part; Tamura has documented, however, his expressed aim. As when he wrote in a 1947 article for *Gunzō*,

“Thought” (*shisō*) is, at this time threatening to push us down; it does nothing else. “Thought” has, for a long time, continued through the despotic government shaded with the colors of a police state but now the body is rising up in opposition. The distrust of “thought” is complete. We now believe in nothing but our own bodies. Only the body is real (*jjitsu*). The body’s weariness, the body’s desires, the body’s anger, the body’s intoxications, the body’s confusion, the body’s fatigue--only these constitute reality. It is because

of all these things that we realize, for the first time, that we are alive. (“*Nikutai ga ningen de aru*” 12)

Kamiya Tadataka situates this article in the postwar reaction to the oppression of the war years. Kamiya, reading this history through a Marxist dialectic, sees the time as one of continual movement between oppression and liberation. Tamura’s article is placed in the space between one such opposition: on one side is the nation (here, *kokka*) on the political front and on the literary front a spiritualism (*seishinshugi*) as represented in prewar literature of the *Shirakabaha*, and Shiga Naoya, in particular. Kamiya echoes Tamura, characterizing this literature as an “over-spiritualization, and thus impotent to provide any moorings or direction for the people in their distress” (6). This reflects, again, the *nikutai* as physical body that is placed in opposition to the *kokutai*, the national body. It also reflects how direct was the relationship between national body and physical body, and how strongly this relationship was felt.

Kamiya also places this discussion in a larger historical context by plotting a Japanese literary history that has been a movement between the poles of spiritual concerns and bodily concerns. As such, the *kindai no chōkoku* discussions, as well as other intellectual discussions of the war, focus not on issues of winning or losing as much as on the location of the spiritual and the body *vis-à-vis* the war, he writes. This too takes the discussion back to Proletarian issues, for example, and other prewar literary issues that now figure significantly in the postwar years. There are a conglomerate of such issues brought into relief by the war (9).

When Tamura (and Kamiya) place the individual body in a situation facing the state which is a restrictive dominating body, the image conforms to the sort of State envisioned by Althusser, who defined ideology as “the system of the ideas and representations which dominate the mind of a man or a social group” (149). In this

construct the State is a system of apparatuses to produce a proletariat (in this context, subjects) that will unquestioningly carry out the desires of the ruling (political) class.⁶¹

Tamura placed the body in opposition to thought (or ideology; it is bracketed in the original). By “thought/ideology” he refers to the propaganda spread by the wartime government encouraging the populace to subsume individual desires for the goals of the nation. In opposition and reaction, the body will now be the focus. The body--its desires and cruelty, usually relating to sex--is now focused upon. The focus becomes a search for liberation for this body and from this body, but, as Tamura points out, in the postwar disillusionment and deprivation nothing exists but that body. Ideology has been discounted. In the name of ideology the entire nation had fought, died, and starved, but it was a sham and the struggle was to no purpose. Ideology is meaningless and the only thing left is one's own body. A sense of purpose and liberation is from the body, yet by the body.

“Ideology” also refers here to the strictures that make up societies, the codes of conduct that are seen as divorcing the individual from their basic human instincts and drives. The ideology at work in society lauds the fishmonger who advertises bargain prices because he has cut out the middle man, for example, while it disparages the pan-pan girls who can offer their wares at “bargain” prices because they do not rely on a pimp or a madam (“Nikutai no mon” 35). Tamura is at pains to point out that it is only the society of women in this story which is “natural”. Their society is wild and natural in a manner that resembles wild cats (to which they are often compared.) This is to construct a society of little pretense, a network that ensures mutual survival, a

⁶¹Althusser (153-165) expands this discussion of the State as a restrictive, dominating “body” which resonates with the images that inform the work of Tamura, Ango, Noma, and others discussed here.

mode of life where the individual is in close relation to basic desires for food, sex, shelter, and companionship. They have established a community where those needs are satisfied without external interference.

Tamura is also concerned by the abstraction, the cerebral unsubstantiality, that has plagued Japan's literature. On this point Tamura invokes the *seishin*, the abstract and ethereal aspect of Japanese culture and artistic practice that prevents the individual from living authentically, as he sees it. In literature it is the effete sort of abstractions and introspective ruminations of a writer like Shiga Naoya or others in the *watakushishōsetsu* tradition that he blames for this tendency. He frames this emphasis on the distinctly immaterial and unsubstantial ideology, in place before the war, that makes a sacrifice of the body. Tamura has, then, prewar literature and cultural production as much in his sights as that of the war period itself. Kamiya expands the focus a bit and brings in the eroticism of writers such as Nagai Kafū and Dazai Osamu and equates the *nikutai* with a "true sensitivity" (*jikkan*). There had been a growing interest and literary treatment in the physical as the base for truly grasping the individual, but this tendency had been quashed by the censors (6). With Tamura's work, this prewar tendency was expanded and given greater urgency and immediacy. As Tamura repeatedly writes, it is a viewpoint based on his own experiences.

Tamura is concerned that this physical individual be restored so that the abstracting tendencies of the national body can no longer bend the people to its pernicious will. A society of such individuals is, in his mind, the best insurance that the war years will not be duplicated. Tamura fears that the prewar tendency to abstraction is being resurrected in the postwar period and that even while many are ostensibly trying to overturn the oppressive militaristic tendencies of wartime society, the result may be that the people will again lose touch with their true natures, as it were, and Japan will again be over-spiritualized. In Tamura's mind it was precisely

the emphasis on abstract spiritual purity at the expense of physical needs that left his countrymen susceptible to the militarism that lead them like sheep into the war. Like his characters, Tamura wants his readers to value the physical. Part of his point is the timing: given the postwar deprivations an awareness of the physical is unavoidable; his hope is that this experience may begin a tradition of the physical that will have wider repercussions (“Ningen ga nikutai de aru” 12-14).

Tamura began his *Gunzō* article by noting that his recent work has been criticized for its lack of thought (again, *shisō* which I translate as “ideology”). He muses that thought/ideology *had* existed, in abundance--and look where that got us--following blindly we were led into a disastrous war, is the unwritten answer. A work that lacks such “thought” (ideology) is then to be lauded. There had been more than enough of the selfless sacrifice encouraged by the State during the war and it had been rendered meaningless by the Surrender, the lies it exposed, and the postwar disruption of society. In his words,

The “ideology” that the Japanese have up to this point taken to be ideology was an ideology unable to prevent this war. Further, it is an ideology that was dismembered and lost with the advent of battle. . . . Thus, the high place [I accord] this “*nikutai*”, which denies “ideology” still existing in Japan following the defeat, is to bring us back to the situation of freedom which is the original form of humanity. (“Nikutai bungaku no kiban” 228)

And again,

An ideology which forgets the *nikutai* has held a monopoly and from this has arisen the discourse (*setsu*) of a deified emperor, from this has arisen the ideology of the *kamikaze*, from this has arisen the idea of the holy warrior. The fragility of the Japanese view of mankind which forgets the *nikutai* has been fully blown open to exposure by this last war. (“Kore kara no watakushi” 231)

Since the ideology and morals of Japan to this point have been proven entirely bankrupt by the war, he therefore proposes exactly the opposite approach by a focus on the carnal, for the body is now “everything” (“Ningen ga nikutai de aru” 12). “No more of the ideological” he wants to say, “now it is time to focus on the individual.” He will further insist that since this body is the correct focus of our interest it will of course be the correct focus of literature.

This emphasis on the body is also an attempt to rectify what he sees as the over-spiritualized body promoted during the war years. During the war thought/ideology emphasized the spiritual divorced from the physical/body. During the war, that ideology forgot the body while in fact, in the struggle for survival, the body was everyone’s prime concern. It was an age when the spiritual was over-emphasized, when “higher” ideals were continuously being pushed on people, divorced from everyday physical experience. It is that imbalance, intimates Tamura, that contributed to the sterility of the war years. The war years were primarily physical, years of struggle to maintain physical survival, but there was no support of the physical. All was rhetoric and ideology. The thought/ideology of the State offered no help, no assistance, no resistance, for the people to use in their plight. In that dehumanized time the reigning ideals of government and society were useless. The ideology of the State was, after all, the cause of that dehumanization. As he says at the end of the article “Ningen ga nikutai de aru,” it is only by exploring the carnal that we will know what it is to be human. Herein is liberation. (Herein, as well, is a common tie to Ango and his use of *daraku*, as noted earlier.) Again, in Tamura’s work being human means a focus on the physical, the quotidian needs of food, shelter, and sex.

An erotic sensuality is established in the very first lines of “Nikutai no mon”:
 “When Osei no sen and the self-named Asada sen are unclothed, their breasts do not

yet swell in mature fullness. They are nineteen but their skin lacks the glow one expects, their muscles lack a healthy plumpness. The paleness of their bodies (*shintai*) seems a trifle sickly” (33). The next paragraph focuses on Osei no sen who is getting a tattoo. She is in a cramped two room shack, one room of which is a famed tattooer’s shop. The burned-out and crumbling buildings of the *ashiato* line the banks. She is having her name emblazoned on her upper arm, a totem to scare off pan-pan girls who would dare encroach upon her territory. It is the opening of a trashy novel, replete with prostitutes, gangsters, tattoos, the underworld.

Likewise, the anti-establishment attitude is readily apparent in “Nikutai no mon”. First, the story is of a society of women in a society we know to be controlled by men. The opening scenes present the male-dominated criminal underworld, itself preying on the established “society”. This society of men appears only briefly. It is a scene that pictures the topsy-turvy nature of postwar Tokyo. The professionals mix with the amateurs in a confusion of professions and classes. Returned soldiers, last year the nation’s heroes, are now black marketers. They stand alongside careerist *yakuza* and other criminals, some important, most petty. “The distinction between professional and amateur is blurred; as it is in society at large, so it is here” (33). All the old accepted patterns and assumptions have broken down. It is a new world. It is still somewhat unreal.

The group of women who work as prostitutes and live nearby are consistently portrayed as a pack of animals in a Tokyo that has become jungle. The women are themselves innocents; it is a coming of age story. Cast as animals, as innocent children, we are again reminded of their displacement from “society”, whether that of men or of adults. It is primitive yet somehow pristine and innocent; their business of prostitution is purely for the purpose of survival. They are too young to know the “pleasures of the flesh” as it is worded here. The story’s central conflict arises when

adult, mature emotions--love--interferes with an emotionless sex-as-trade that is their means of survival. Their naiveté and youth is underscored by the fact that they exchange pleasures of the flesh but do not themselves experience that pleasure.

Their aboriginal society is bound by ritual and taboos; the strictest of commandments in this society demands expulsion should it be transgressed: "If there is one who exchanges their body (*nikutai*) with another without the exchange of proper fees, they become an outcast from this community" (35-36). Sex exchanged for pleasure and not a harder coin is the principle taboo of their society; transgressing that taboo threatens their economic existence and therefore their survival. This taboo is not set up out of any moral concern for right and wrong. Such concerns have no place here. Only measures that will ensure survival are tolerated. Their taboos and rules are not determined by any artificial strictures. Sex exchanged for pleasure signals their change from innocents to adults and this too threatens the survival of their society. It threatens their ability to carry out their trade by signaling the end to their childlike innocence, which also places them outside "society".

Their idyllic community is threatened first when one of their members falls in love. She is a war widow who had been married and thus, we are told, knows the pleasures of the flesh. She is mature in contrast to the naive youth of the other girls. When she breaks the commandment--she sleeps with a man whom she loves, at no charge--the community deems she must be punished. A sacrifice is needed to preserve the group's solidarity and identity, which also underscores the primitive structure of their society. Tamura goes out of his way to cast them as animal-like and primitive, doing what they do not out of any decadent pleasure or desire, but simply as an exchange by which they might survive. Traditional morality, prescribed by the reigning ideology, has no place here, it is meaningless in the struggle for survival. It is meaningless as they try to live in the society wrought by the war.

Into their hidden den (it is called a “nest”, contributing to the wild atmosphere) wanders a young and virile young man who has been shot. His entrance is the second force that threatens the stability of their community. Ibuki and the war widow portend the loss of innocence for with their maturity comes a knowledge of fleshly pleasures. Their presence forms the central crisis of the story. Ibuki is a returned soldier active in the black market (which echoes Sakaguchi Ango’s sarcastic portrayals of yesterday’s soldiers as today’s black marketers). Ibuki is twenty-one and a loner. He has been shot by the police and escapes into their den. He disturbs the equilibrium for he has been outside, abroad, he is Other. He quickly tires of their youthful naiveté. He will stay with them until he recuperates. He falls in love with Machiko, the woman expelled from their society, but he has also become the center of the universe for this group of women, the object of their desire, an increasingly mature desire. Ibuki, one of the returned soldiers cast adrift in this murky new society, enters into the women’s society and disturbs the balance they have established, so cut-off is their society from that of men, of the world above.

This is what Tamura intends. By presenting an Other society, he can present the idyllic natural society of women (not unlike Gauguin’s Tahiti). It is ideal and idyllic because it allows them to live out his vision of the authentic life. His imagery stresses that this is non-normal, ideal. Japanese society as a whole has become painfully aware of the needs of the physical body. The world that Tamura presents as a model is an idealized primitive innocence of existence where one can live in authentic relationship to one’s self. Whatever the physical realities, there still lingers the old ideologies. If this more authentic society is not strenuously emphasized the old ideology will take over.

Tamura, as is clear from his essays, wanted to set up an alternate version of living, a more authentic, less ethereal sort of existence. He intends to present a

manner of living that may patch up the separation between spirit and body he diagnoses as weakening society. This is a powerful story and its contemporary popularity suggests that he touched on something the readership related too. He offers a world with a measure of happiness where basic needs are met and spiritual concerns seem superfluous. There is individual autonomy and authenticity. These women seem in control of their lives, not subject to the demands and badgerings of “society”. They are not subject to a government that commandeers all resources, physical and mineral, for all-out war, or for postwar rebuilding. They live parallel to that society and off of that society. Yet they do not seem to be constrained by that society. (That most of the action is subterranean is no accident.) Again, this parallels Ango and his call for “decadence.” Perhaps the contemporary interest in “Nikutai no mon” and its prostitutes has to do, as Nishikawa Nagao suggests, with the sense among writers that they are themselves close to the prostitutes in position, marginal. Also, the prostitutes tragically victimized by the war come to embody the humiliation of postwar Japan while also embodying the freedom of that time (63).

Tamura’s Romanticism in these portrayals (I am again reminded of Gauguin) is obvious. There is no real hint of the sort of controlled desperate existence, the very lack of control implicit in a survival by means of sex trades. Tamura frequently mentions that they are unwashed and smell of sweat, living in a basement that is like a cave. This is to remind us of the animal-like nature of their existence, some sort of idealized natural state. Their basement is to be a lion’s den. They are cats on the prowl. This, it seems to me, deflects from any of the pre-civilized atmosphere their situation is to invoke. Thus, a closer look at this story reveals other moments that begin to work against reading this as a model of living. By the very unreality of its setting, the device to separate it from greater “society” makes it closer to fantasy. Precisely because it is not the “real” world and is cut-off from society it slides into

utopian fantasy. The images he presents are at odds with the goals he intends. Mori Eiichi notices a similar sort of slippage when he quotes from Tamura's essays to show that Tamura was interested primarily in the character of Ibuki, the repatriated soldier. Ibuki is to capture the reader's imagination by representing the despair and bleakness of society, the disenfranchisement of those who have fought for the society. According to his own essays, Tamura intended to paint a picture of a soldier's resourcefulness in the face of an impossible situation, newly released from the oppressive yoke of a military government. It is the women, however, who are painted most vividly and stay with the reader (239).

The ending also complicates reading this as a model of salvation or authentic living. It is when Maya becomes aware of her body, comes to know sexual pleasure and moves from childlike innocence to adult-like knowledge that she is banished from the community. She is damned by her move to another realm of existence, a new understanding of society and human relationships. "Maya was struck with the idea that even if she were banished to Hell, she would not be separated from the pleasure of the flesh she experienced for the first time [with Ibuki]. She felt that a new life was beginning" (54). A new life is indeed beginning, but this entrance into a fuller knowledge of her body, replete with adult understandings, portends death and banishment. If death is requisite before moving into a new life then the ideal life does not exist in their society after all. Her's is a rebirth, long-awaited, that removes her from the very society Tamura intends to endorse. The salvation he intends is not to be found in the society he paints so positively.

Her life to this point, like that of her compatriots in this "authentic", primitive society, has been presented laudably. We have understood the women to be free from society's artificial restraints, living authentic lives of unrestrained naturalness. Yet that life is lost at precisely the moment that Maya achieves a fuller understanding of her

body. The utopian society that makes its own rules and lives for its own needs is disrupted with the entrance of adult emotions. Adult emotions are signified by pleasure in sex, i.e. love. The former existence is gladly sacrificed; Maya loses consciousness, perhaps even dies, from the punishment--hung by her wrists from the ceiling and beaten by the others--deemed commiserate with her transgression of the taboo. She is banished, yet without apparent regret.

“In the subterranean gloom [of their lair] the body of Borneo Maya, hanging from the ceiling, is enveloped in a faint corona of light and has a solemnity and magnificence like that of the prophet on the cross” (54). This final line of the story casts her as a prophet, a martyr for an impossible cause. It proves impossible because the movement into an adult realm, which is concurrently the movement to a fuller understanding of the carnal, is damned. Fuller understanding of the body in this society developed for the body leads to her expulsion. She can never return to the warmth of that fuller society.

This doesn't mean it is a badly constructed story, nor that it is even internally inconsistent. It does however work against the ideology (I use the word intentionally) that Tamura has expounded in his essays. He has proposed to do away with any ideology, yet his proposal is, after all, an ideology of its own. It is artificially presented, following an intellectual, not carnal, logic. His ideology seems to follow the path of the ideologies he decries, as ultimately unhelpful in the important crises of life--like the transition from innocent childhood to knowing adulthood. In that sense the story still remains the “truer” by putting the lie to enforced and cerebral ways of living. His basic premise is upheld, to the detriment of the proposed plan.

Tamura has given us a world that conforms to the vision hinted at in “Nikutai ga ningen de aru.” These women have set up a functional society in postwar Tokyo, living according to the principles of their bodies. The primitive nature of that society

incurs the censure of “society”; they have discounted the ethereal abstractions of society. Their society follows rules of their own choosing and is established to ensure their survival. In this respect their society is parallel to the “legitimate” world, yet their world incurs the censure of that “society”. Tamura’s “liberation from the body, by the body” is a rejection of “society’s” rules and ideology which denounces women such as this who are living according to natural laws. “Society” prevents the individual from living according to “natural” laws, from being “real” or authentic. In this way Tamura espouses the “natural” and decries “society” to champion a lifestyle of decadence.

There are a number of points to be reiterated in this discussion of the body initiated by Tamura Taijirō. For one, there is a basic adversarial quality to this “literature of the body.” It is suffused with an anti-establishment air and it is driven by a mission, a thrust to return to something basic, human, and primitive. As such, it takes as its object the political realm, perhaps foremost, but also levels its attack at established literary concerns. In this mission is concealed a salvation, for Tamura proposes a way to be free from the over-spiritualization of the age.

His emphasis on the *nikutai* is a reaction to the ideology of society and the State; this is explicit both in this story and in the *Gunzō* article. Underlying his insistence on the *nikutai* is the intent to discount the Other, the *kokutai*. On the one hand, focus on the *nikutai* is a reaction against literary precursors, the over-spiritualization of literature in the prewar years. The other object of opposition is the Nation, the *kokutai*, the national polity that has not given sufficient attention to its Other, the physical body, leading the nation into a disastrous war. His point is also made clear in the title of this article: “Man is flesh” (“Ningen ga nikutai de aru”) as well as in the phrase that becomes something of a rallying cry: “The body is

everything” (“*nikutai koso subete da*”). These all work together as he opposes the ideology of the State (body) against the existence and needs of the individual (body).

In this way Tamura's work is representative of the much wider discussion in which Sartre's writings were received. There is a basic adversarial quality to this “literature of the body.” It is suffused with an anti-establishment tint and it is driven by a mission, a thrust to return to something basic, human, and primitive. As such, it takes as its object the political realm, perhaps foremost, but also levels its attack at the established literary concerns. In this mission is concealed a salvation, for Tamura proposes a way to be free from the over-spiritualization of the age.

The importance here is that Tamura's work is largely responsible for the discourse of the body from which Sartre's early fiction was understood. Sartre's Existentialism came to postwar Japan wrapped in this rubric of the physical and of the *nikutai*. It was received at the same time that Tamura's insistence on the *nikutai* was pervasive. As Okuno Takeo has suggested, it proved a powerful and pervasive pairing of discourses, the existentialist and the physical, that would stimulate literature for decades to come (“Tamura Taijirō” 250). Among those who are part of this confluence are the writers discussed below, Noma Hiroshi, Ōe Kenzaburō, and Mishima Yukio.

Chapter 3: Noma Hiroshi's Body

“These difficulties all stem from the fact that I try to unite my consciousness not with
my body, but with the body *of others*”. . . .

Still the body will be easier to know than the Other's soul.

Being and Nothingness

“I have never before had such a strong feeling that I was devoid of secret dimensions,
confined within the limits of my body.”

Nausea

I. Introduction: Noma, the Postwar Body, and Existentialism

Noma Hiroshi “is the first voice of the postwar writers, and his is, in a sense, the first voice of the entire body of postwar literature” (Honda, *Monogatari sengo bungakushi* 1: 131). Noma Hiroshi is of course not the only writer with whom I could profitably begin this discussion of postwar Japanese literature, but as Honda's oft-echoed claim underscores Noma is deserving of more critical attention than has been afforded him, especially in the West. Noma Hiroshi is, for example, widely credited with having introduced or discovered the style now associated with “postwar

writing."⁶² Nor is Noma Hiroshi the only writer with whom I could profitably begin this discussion of existentialism in Japan either.⁶³ Noma Hiroshi is, however, as I will show, among the first to display the existentialist sensibility in Japan, an indigenous expression of existentialism, as it were. The existentialist flavor of Noma's work did not arise in response to Sartre's work but in anticipation of it. I also refer to his work as indigenous because it relates to existentialism as literature of the body, a discourse, as I have outlined in the previous chapter that is characteristic of postwar Japanese writings.

Noma's early fiction is existentialist, by which I mean his characterizations are of alienated individuals in extreme and absurd situations, keenly suffering feelings of *angst*, disillusion, and despair. In this chapter I will explore how what we find in Noma's fiction conforms to existentialist fiction in Japan in the late 1940s. Noma's characters display an acute awareness of the materiality, the physicality, the facticity (in Sartre's lexicon) of the body on which the awareness of Self and Other depends. The relationships between characters then conform to the Sartrean characters'

⁶²Keene echoes Honda when he writes: "Noma Hiroshi is often treated as the emblematic postwar writer" (1: 974). Likewise, a Japanese literary dictionary reiterates that, "With *Kurai e* (1946) Noma appeared on the literary stage as the standard bearer for the 'first wave of postwar writers'" (Kindai Sakka Kenkyū Jiten Kankokukai 315).

⁶³I refer the reader again, as in the previous chapter, to Tsuge Teruhiko's discussion of existentialist writers in Japan which includes, among discussions of Noma Hiroshi and Ōe Kenzaburō, a synopsis of the work of Shiina Rinzō, Haniya Yutaka, Abe Kōbō, Takeda Taijun, Hotta Yoshie, and Kurahashi Yumiko.

struggles to thwart or cast the Gaze integral in the Self-Other construct. Here, as earlier, the first task is to re-create the *milieu* in which Sartre's fiction was first received in Japan--as a "literature of the body"--and then to attempt a reading of the Japanese fiction through the philosophy implied by that stance. Further, as we shall see, Noma's work conforms to the contemporary (i.e. Japanese and postwar) tendency to read existentialism as a literature of the body, a fiction that takes as central issues of the body. This is the point made by Tsuge Teruhiko when he writes that, "in the world of Noma Hiroshi's early works, issues surrounding the *jiga*, and of relations between self and Other, are expressed with an extreme sense of the physical (*shintai*), which clearly shows its point of contact with existentialism" ("Jitsuzonshugi" 141)

The concerns for the body that underlie Sartre's understanding of Self and Other are replicated in Noma's stories. These complementary constructs were at work in Japan's literary context and Noma is a prime example. For this reason I will attempt to offer a reading of selected early works of his through the related constructs of the body (*nikutai*) and Self/Other. Noma's imagery also replicated Sartre's in that his characters are keenly aware of the split between persons that forms the battleground of existence where two conscious beings vie with each other at the level of the Look.

The early stories of Noma Hiroshi, and in particular his first work *Kurai e* (*Dark Pictures*, 1946) evidence many of the troubling issues and concerns of Japanese literature after the Pacific War. When *Kurai e* appeared in 1946 it was immediately hailed as the important work of a new literary voice. That new voice was characterized by a convoluted style; *Kurai e* was received by many as a work appropriately difficult for a difficult time. This style is what first drew the attention of contemporary writers and critics but Noma is representatively "postwar" also for the

concerns and issues that he raises, issues and concerns that become emblematic of this period. These concerns come under the broad rubric of existentialism, issues of loneliness and *angst*, of individual responsibility and action, for example.

Noma is often discussed as one of the “first wave” of postwar writers such as Shiina Rinzō, Haniya Yutaka, and Umezaki Haruo. (With these writers a gritty, often pessimistic rawness pervades mainstream literature as it had not before.) Noma was a committed Marxist and activist throughout his life. He was not, however, a party hack: his subsequent stories were to be regularly criticized by the Party establishment for their lack of socialist realism or the display of bourgeois values. This is the discourse running through reaction to his work, initiated by Miyamoto Yuriko, one that runs through his long career. Miyamoto herself is one of the main protagonists in Noma’s history of falling in and out of favor with the Communist Party.

Noma’s early stories are consistent in that they portray soldiers wounded, more spiritually than bodily perhaps, on the battlefield. These soldiers return home to find they are on another battlefield, everyone here with scars physical and spiritual, Japan the country of the walking wounded. The war hangs over and haunts everyone, soldier and civilian alike. Noma’s characters are rendered helpless by the war, unable to form relationships, unable to rely on others, unable to get out of the prison of their bodies. There are no escapes and no exits from their selves. This was the lesson of the war: in a struggle for survival, no one dare trust another, sharing rations meant suicide, each was cut off from the other. This radical physical isolation is continued in the day-to-day struggle for survival of postwar Japan. The war’s end is, in many ways, no end. The relationship of the physical and the war persists and is a focus of his fiction: “The war has bore a deep root into people’s sensibilities and it is played out on the surface [of their bodies]. The way of thinking which underlies *Hōkai kankaku* (*A Sense of Disintegration*, 1948) is this idea that should you not consider people in

the postwar from this angle, there is no way to explain contemporary man” (Noma, “Jibun no sakuhin ni tsuite” 255).

Noma’s stories all revolve around impossible relationships, doomed from the start because one “body” is cut off from the other. The body of another—a physical relationship—proffers the possibility of salvation from one’s own loneliness and radical isolation and physicality, but liberation is always proved impossible because this connection can no longer be made. We immediately recognize the existentialist palette of loneliness and despair, *angst* and *ennui*. We immediately recognize as well the postwar concern and obsession with physicality and carnality that constitutes *nikutai bungaku*, a literature of the body associated primarily with the fiction of Tamura Taijirō and Sakaguchi Ango. In this literature (if one can discuss it as a coherent whole) is voiced a celebration of the physical and of individual desire in direct opposition to the ethereal spirituality that was promoted by the Japanese government during the Pacific War.

Noma's characters consistently suffer, as do Sartre's Roquentin, in self-doubt and bad faith, as when Roquentin realizes that Annie "forever oblig[es] her partners to invent a rôle" (*Nausea* 141). So too, Noma's men are subject to the gaze of the Other, a lover, and they are unable to act. Likewise when we read in Sartre that, "As I appear to the Other, so I am. . . . In order to make myself recognized by the Other, I must risk my own life" (*Being and Nothingness* 237) there is an overlap of feeling. The consciousness of being "bound to a body" is overpowering. Noma's men never escape. In the struggle for self-assertion they always encounter Sartre's inescapable truth: One is at the mercy of the Gaze, either to accept its indictment or to struggle against it. One risks one's life but one loses. Nothing comes of it, there will be no

self-definition.⁶⁴ The men are left lonely. They are left as physicality only, a lump of flesh, material object. This is the legacy of the war where wartime deprivation reduced these individuals to a bodiliness from which they are unable to will an escape. Noma's characters are unable to transcend, to take the risk, to act and *be*. Further, as if to underscore Sartre's claim that "as I appear to the Other, so I am" these woman have an image of what the men are and the men find themselves unable to transcend it. The struggle begins with the interaction of two bodies of flesh. For Noma's characters the battle is lost at this point when the Other subverts their freedom and leaves them imprisoned in physicality. The struggle also ends with the interaction of two bodies of flesh for they can never transcend those physical barriers.

I will concentrate in this chapter on Noma's early short stories and novels, the works of the postwar period. Ōe Kenzaburō, who often acknowledges his debt to the work of Noma, has divided these works into two categories: those that describe humanity through the filter of military life and those that treat the relations between men and women through the filter of the body ("Kaisetsu" 367). My focus will be on the latter⁶⁵ because, again, this emphasis on the body is precisely what gives

⁶⁴This turns Miyamoto Yuriko's praise on its head. She praised this work highly for taking up the theme of the development of individuality; but viewed through the entire *oeuvre* we are struck by its pessimistic conclusions, by the despair with which the characters take on this project.

⁶⁵These include *Kurai e* (*Dark Pictures*, 1946), "Futatsu no nikutai" ("Two Bodies", 1946), "Kao no naka no akai tsuki" ("A Red Moon in Her Face", 1947), "Nikutai wa nurete" ("The Body is Drenched", 1947), and *Hōkai kankaku* (*A Sense of Disintegration*, 1948).

existentialism in postwar Japan its particular flavor. That is, this emphasis on the body marked the Japanese understanding and initial interaction with Sartre and existentialism.

The body and its desires are central in Noma's stories of this period: the body that draws one into relationships, the body that engages in sex, the body that prevents these relationships from continuing, the physical body that gets in the way and prevents two bodies from connecting one with the other. As a literature of the body, this is exactly the sort of image one expects. As a literature of the body, it overlaps with existentialist literature in the context of postwar Japan. In Noma's case the body is engaged in a quest for liberation and connectedness, a desire to connect with another, to be understood, to feel human. Men look for salvation in the body of a woman. The man wants to crawl inside the woman but the barriers of the body prevent it. There is always the layer of skin to prevent one from connecting with the other. This is a persistent frustration in this *oeuvre*: the body that promises liberation also renders it impossible.

In Nishikawa Nagao's reading, the central theme of these early stories is the inability of communication between persons, the inability to connect and find salvation from individual loneliness and despair:

In concrete terms this [inability of communication] results from the disruption between men and women and the difficulties that returned soldiers faced in the adjustment to [civilian] society. The two are closely linked. Noma's initial pursuit in *Kurai e*, however, and the fiction after always begins from the critical issue in postwar freedom, the issue of the *nikutai*--this is testament to just how warped had become sexuality and the *nikutai* for Japanese during the war. . . . To the individual self (*koga*) the *nikutai* is everything, it is society and it is

history; yet the literature of the left-wing and the Communist Party seemed to be overlooking this aspect. (258)

This inability to connect is rooted in very real societal issues such as the returned soldier and his difficulty of readjustment. He has returned to the physical desperation of postwar Japan and his remembrances of the battlefield, inevitably recast in physical images, still haunts him. There is no escape from the physical body. This is compounded by what is taken to be the natural difficulty in communication between men and women for there proves to be an insurmountable split that separates two people. More, these are rooted in the war and postwar experiences, experiences where physicality had become “warped” or “strained” (*hizamu*) during the war years. The physical body has been warped and strained because of what was required of it as a soldier, and also by the burden imposed by the ideology of the state. Imaged in these characters is the conflict between *nikutai* and *kokutai*. The reaction to this strain sets the stage for Noma’s postwar fiction just as it did for the fiction of Tamura Taijirō and Sakaguchi Ango. All of these writers are participating in a similar moment and are taking up the issues of that moment. In a chapter entitled “The difficulty of communication and the birth of a new literature” Nishikawa roots the inability to communicate between people to the war experience and its horrors. He explores, further, how a writer like Noma feels compelled to write of those experiences but find that the reality often lies beyond communication,

Many of the writers of the postwar group (*sengoha*) felt that they themselves had been assigned the fate of passing on their horrific experience in the name of those who had died, or in place of those who had died. But because their experiences during and after the war went beyond anything imaginable, it seemed practically impossible to relate that experience to those who did not share them. (230)

This then becomes the source for Noma's convoluted prose and style, an attempt to capture and convey a reality that is unimaginable, that is inexpressible via conventional methods. As Nishikawa suggests, Noma's expression of these concerns put him at odds with the Party and frequently brought him into conflict with the Communist Party apparatus (*Shinchōsha Jiten Henshūbu* 984). (Nishikawa would stress his literary integrity in this contest.) It is a curious clash of ideologies, for the underlying antipathy against the wartime regime and ideology that I identify in these motifs clashes with the Marxist ideology that Noma espouses and the even more rigid ideology of the official Communist Party. Noma does not waver however in his commitment to Marxism and the official tenets of the Party while pursuing the individual, which brings him in conflict with those stated goals. Noma's insistence on the individual body in the face of a body of ideology reads like Tamura Taijirō's in this sense. Both of them seem blind to the ideology they themselves are advocating. Even so, the postwar insistence on the physical and on individual freedom exerted the stronger pull for both writers although, as in Noma's case, it brought him into direct conflict with a system of thought that he nonetheless espoused.

Noma's fiction earned him the censure of the Party because these are not the preferred images of workers and the masses, but of individual men and women that meet as two bodies. In all cases the two individuals, two carnalities, are separated by a steely membrane which simultaneously contains them. To continue this image borrowed from *Hōkai kankaku*, the body is like a canteen, whose impervious metallic skin holds in fluids. Two bodies can no more become intertwined than can two army-issue canteens. Two individuals are forever separated no matter how close they may seem to be to each other. Water and fluids threaten to splash out, but the skin proves as impervious as a canteen's steel. The skin proved on the battlefield to be strong as steel, strong enough to keep a man together, to keep him intact, to save him. It also,

of course, keeps him totally within himself, isolated from all others. This is not so different from Sartre's body, distinct from and cut off from all others, always in conflict with all others, locked in the struggle to assert individual freedom and volition. In Sartre, too, the body's borders determine the borders of relationships.

The war had forefronted the needs of the body at the expense of the spiritual even in the face of the persistent claims of the government to the contrary. The all-consuming struggle to preserve the body on the battlefield has not been alleviated with war's end. The physical reality that separated men on the front now separates men from women in postwar Japan. Wartime separations have solidified into impermeable dividers; memories of the battlefield where sharing one's rations was suicide is linked to the physical and spiritual poverty of the postwar. Lessons learned on the battlefield continue to haunt everyone even now that the war is ostensibly over. "Life" had been reduced to physical survival. The war is over but a memory of the body as locus of survival remains. This becomes very clear in Kitayama Toshio's experience ("Kao no naka no akai tsuki") where the Self is nothing but alone: "He had learned in violent battle that a man preserves his life with no power but his own, he eases despair by himself, and must watch his own death. Each man, like the water in each canteen, must hold himself in that canteen" (119).

Because of its steely quality the body prevents these characters from finding what they most desire: liberation, freedom from the barriers which constrain them. As Nishikawa intimates, the ability to communicate between persons would bring liberation (256-258). Before the war the connections with another could have been made and one could have found release. Now, skin, steel, and glass prevent it. Following the horrors and extreme situations of the war the individual is irrevocably conscious of how constrained they are by the body. There is now no exit, no way to

transgress the body's constraints. The body has been made indelibly primary, it cannot now be gotten rid of. It's borders cannot be transgressed.

Noma's men confront the tensile strength of the steely barrier separating them from all others every time they try to establish a relationship with a woman. The woman becomes the Other and the men are petrified by the gaze of the woman, unable to assert their individuality. The men want to reclaim their freedom but invariably relinquish it. The woman/Other decides what they will be; she, as Other, always preempts his freedom. (These works are not a little misogynist.) The men consistently express their desire to crawl inside the woman but they are always left in their radical freedom, in an isolation which underscores their terrible freedom.⁶⁶

The first concern of these characters is their carnal bodies. They worry about their bodies, about their lovers' bodies, about sex. This relationship becomes a struggle between two people which conforms exactly to the Sartrean model of human relationships. This is not unexpected. Following the Sartrean thought implicit in the fiction, it is the Gaze that makes me aware of my existence, as object. It is by the Gaze that I try to assert my freedom over the Other by casting the Other as object first. The Gaze plays a foundational role in Sartre's philosophy, for, as he has in it *Being and Nothingness*, the individual is at the "level of non-thetic self-consciousness. This means first of all that there is no self to inhabit my consciousness, nothing therefore to

⁶⁶The curious thing about this powerful image of body is canteen is that, as the soldier knows only too well, the skin is not the impervious steel wall of a canteen. The canteen may survive a bullet, but the skin will not. Preserving the physical body became the first order of business on the battlefield. Maintaining the integrity of those borders was of prime importance, and now it continues. (My thanks to Jeff Johnson for calling this to my attention.)

which I can refer my acts in order to qualify them.” This is being; I *am*. It is when an Other happens into the hallway where I am, where I have my eye pressed to a keyhole, that this pure state is disrupted and I know my body as object somehow distinct from me. “But all of a sudden I hear footsteps in the hall. Someone is looking at me!” I have become the object of the Gaze. I can no longer simply *be* in unreflective self-consciousness. I am object. “First of all, I now exist as *myself* for my unreflective consciousness.” I am a thing with a body. Further, it is the Other that has initiated this move from existence to objectness. The Gaze of the Other has also cast me into a more rigid role: I am now a peeping-tom because I have been seen as such. My freedom has been usurped for I no longer simply exist, I exist as something, as a certain thing (*Being and Nothingness* 259-261).

What once was pure, unreflective consciousness has been made aware of its bodiliness. This “peeping-tom” is five feet ten inches tall with brown hair (or whatever). This physical body is ever-present in Sartre and it conforms to the *nikutai*, the fleshly body of such importance to Tamura Taijirō and Sakaguchi Ango. This body conforms to the body emphasized by Sartre, and it was via this *nikutai* that Sartre’s work was first read in postwar Japan. Sartre’s Gaze emanates from a physical body; that Gaze focuses on another physical body. This philosophically forefronted body corresponds to the *nikutai* so important in the late 1940s discourse: “By the mere appearance of the Other, I am put in the position of passing judgment on myself *as an object*, for it as an object that I appear to the Other” (*Being and Nothingness* 222, emphasis mine). These characters feel the oppressive truth of this statement. They are acutely aware of themselves, first, as object. They are struggling to extricate themselves from the stiffness and the burden of their materiality. They are searching for a liberation which would allow them to get beyond the confines of their bodies. In this fiction the Other is invariably female (as it is in Sartre) who projects

the crippling Gaze. Woman is thus desired but debilitating. The man is invariably *seen*, on trains, in rooms, and stopped in his tracks confronted with the need to act, to be, to assert his freedom. This structure conforms to that initiated by Sartre. The struggle for definition will ultimately preclude any substantial interaction between the two, no matter how much it is desired.

The man has been made aware of his body and that body is the *nikutai* I have discussed above. This body is central to these stories in a number of ways: salvation is from the body, the cruel animal body that established its presence in the extreme situations of the war; the body is now the only reality, the only place where action can take place; the body is the only reality and is therefore the only ground of any sort of activity, the only place from which salvation can come. The ideological and the spiritual--the non-material--have been made a travesty by the war and its governments. It is contradictory but there is nothing else. For Noma's characters especially, the body that promises salvation, that hints at communication between persons, prevents that same salvation. This hoped-for liberation is contradictory and doomed to failure. The body is the only alternative available in the face of the disastrous idealization, the cerebral intellectualization provided by the reigning ideology of the wartime government, as noted by Tamura Taijirō. With these postwar writers the physical body is given pre-eminence as an antidote to the wartime abstractions. Again, this is the physical body, the *nikutai*, in opposition to the national body, the *kokutai*.

Thus, Noma's characters struggle to be released from the confines of the body on two fronts, both accented by the war and its aftermath. In particular, at the most obvious level, is the struggle to be free of the body's physical demands of nutrition, nourishment, and physical companionship. The day-to-day demands of physical sustenance are heightened by the shortages of foodstuffs. On another front are the body's demands to extricate itself from the wartime ideology of the national

abstracting body. A man wants nothing to do any longer with the army which demanded that he give everything to some abstract demand for the "glory of the Emperor." This abstracting body pulls the individual in one direction while the physical body pulls in the opposite direction. Both of these needs have been heightened by the war, these too are contradictory, and they threaten to destroy the unity of the body. The helplessness and *angst* felt in the face of these impossible and contradictory demands tie these stories to existentialism while marking them as Japanese. These stories are existentialist, but in postwar Japan this means they are a literature of the body.

Nishikawa Nagao has identified in *Kurai e* and the stories which followed an exploration of issues proceeding from the *nikutai*.

In "Futatsu no nikutai" and the story which followed it, "Nikutai wa nurete", we find expression of the attractive power of the *nikutai* and also the reaction to it, we find the disgust and also the fascination that exists between men and women, that is we find just how deep is the separation that separates men and women. . . . The *nikutai* that is in Noma's work is the stamp of the times and is simultaneously the stamp of Noma Hiroshi. Noma's main characters, virtually without exception, are pulled along by an oppressive *nikutai*. (259)

The *nikutai* is an oppressive and obsessive image throughout this fiction. It is a body made explicit because of wartime demands and deprivations. It is a body now forefronted because of the official wartime discourses which discounted the physical to emphasize the ethereal and spiritual. The physical body is placed in opposition to the national: "Noma is insisting that the *nikutai* of the Japanese has been twisted under the emperor system. Further, for Noma true societal liberation is nothing other than physical liberation and any revolution that does not accompany a fundamental revolution of the body is meaningless" (Nishikawa 262). Again, it all begins and ends

with the physical, but it is ultimately impossible because contradictory. The word Noma employs here for twisted, *nejireru*, is very commonly employed in Noma's fiction to express that the individual, physical body has been warped and contorted by oppressive external forces. Further, it is this insistence on the individual and physical that put Noma in conflict with the Party which demanded images of the worker and the mass. This duel between the individual and the national is made explicit in "Futatsu no nikutai". Yuki Osamu is gripped by the sensation that his body is being torn in two. He feels octopus suckers, one on his back, one on his stomach, about to tear him apart. He feels himself attached to two opposing realms that would pull his body in two. This echoes the opening paragraph where a young man is about to be literally torn in two by sex and by ideology, with sex lashed to one leg and ideology to the other:

The young people of that time were fearfully tearing their bodies into two, bodies which should have been laid in all their nakedness before their lovers. Half was offered to their lovers, the other half to justice. It was like the ancient practice of tying a criminal's legs, each to a different wagon, and pulling them apart. Each of these young people, alone, was looking for love and ideals in their developing bodies. Love and ideals were lashed, one to each leg, wrenching them in entirely different directions, to be torn apart at the crotch. The love between Yuki Osamu and Mitsue was going like this. ("Futatsu no nikutai" 61)

This division of spheres is not only about the body, it is located in the body. The struggle for the body is located in the body and pulls it asunder; there are many examples of this sort of imagery where we find the struggle to be about the body and inscribed on the body. Further, as this opening image makes explicit, the dialectic expressed by Tamura and others that the competing forces are the physical and the

ideal, (i.e. the spiritual) is here represented by an abstract concept such as justice. The body offers the only real escape, but that body is then threatened by the ideology it is trying to extricate itself from. This struggle is located in the body, and imaged in the body. It begins in the body and is to end in the body. The body will be crushed, torn in two, smashed flat, a casualty of this ideology and of this war. This sense of *angst* is captured in a graphic scene near the close of *Kurai e*:

Something appears which is stepping over the thing one is working to preserve and then it gets crushed underfoot by that something appearing overhead. His self is like a frog crushed under the wheels of a truck, forced to flicker out, twitching slightly, in a deep darkness. Fukami Shunsuke thought of the times in this way. He was then gripped by the strange sense that his self, haunted in and by his body, was being twisted somewhere near the middle of his spine. (28)

Noma's work is thus an integral participant in this discourse on the body. Noma's fiction contrasts with that of Tamura by its overlap with the concerns of Sartrean fiction, given that, for example, Sartre's stories were not available in Japan simultaneous to their appearance in France due to wartime prohibitions against enemy languages. Sartre's stories would not appear in Japan until after the war; moreover, the sentiments found there and likewise the sentiments found in Noma's work would not have been tolerated by Japan's wartime regime. Yet in Tsuge Teruhiko's words we read that "In the world of Noma Hiroshi's early works, issues surrounding the *jiga* and of relations between Self and Other are expressed with an extreme sense of the physical (*shintai*), which clearly shows its point of contact with existentialism" ("Jitsuzonshugi" 141).

The existentialism in Noma's work is an indigenous development. It does not evidence borrowings and influences from the West but of simultaneous appearances of similar sentiments in two distinct national literatures. Noma is, in this way, Japan's

first existentialist writer because, especially in hindsight, the similarities between his fiction and that of Sartre are striking. His work is in a similar idiom. Further, the initial readings of Sartre which were as literature of the body is a discourse replicated here, in the work of Noma.

Noma wrote, "[In my early works] I have tried to illuminate the individual strained under Japan's militarism (rather than war as such), limiting myself to those beings made helpless under it" ("Jibun no sakuhin ni tsuite" 260). That is, not only in description but the manner of description is Noma heightening the struggle of the individual against the nation, *nikutai* versus *kokutai*. This concern links him directly to the project of Tamura Taijirō and *nikutai bungaku*. Thus, even more than the battlefield experience—which is well-represented in Noma's work—Noma claims that it is the strain put on the individual by the country's militarism that is oppressive. There is in this a clear statement of intent to portray the *nikutai* suffering under the ideology of the state, the *nikutai* that is marginalized by the discounting of the physical characteristic of the *kokutai*. He gives a clear picture of the physical body oppressed by the national body.

Noma entered the French Literature department of Kyoto University in 1935, at the time a political hotbed. Japan was at war with China, and Kyoto University, as one of the centers of student radical anti-war activity, was the object of much government pressure and repression. Many of his fellow-students were in fact arrested and jailed ("Jibun no sakuhin ni tsuite" 253). It was a heady time to be a student; Noma would make this time a setting for a number of works with college student protagonists (much scholarly effort has been spent determining which fictional characterization corresponds with which "real" friend). His awareness of the intrusive nature of the *kokutai* was therefore very personal and came at a relatively young age; he responds with even more emotional force than Tamura Taijirō.

When he reflects back on this work only a few years later, in 1948, he is dissatisfied with the degree to which he emphasized the *nikutai* in the early stories. In retrospect, he writes of the dichotomy between the spirit and the physical, the *seishin* and the *nikutai*, and wants to work at bridging the gap between the two. My argument is that Noma is reflecting a sensibility that was keenly felt at the time, that the spiritual was set up in contrast to the body. Noma recalls, for example the way these stories effected friends: "Simply put, I now think that developing and expanding a focus on only the *nikutai* was a mistake. However, regarding "Nikutai wa nurete", there are the kind words of a friend of mine who claimed that he had been rescued by this work" ("Jibun no sakuhin ni tsuite" 253). This friend, like many of Noma's readers, felt that he had touched on something that needed to be emphasized; that this forefronting of the *nikutai* was appropriate and necessary, it was a sort of salvation from all that had come before.

The body is a thing; it appears to the Other as a thing. If the "person" wishes to be other than thing the "person" must persuade the Other that it is so. Noma's characters are stuck at this point, paralyzed. It is in the struggle for individuality and the construction of a role that they are thwarted. They find it hard to shed facticity and *be*. They encounter the Other, exactly as Sartre leads us to expect, and they are stopped dead in their tracks, exactly as Sartre leads us to fear. In Noma's fiction this Other is always a woman; she extends the possibility of recognizing the individual for a personalized individual--setting it free from its materiality--and further, offering the possibility for physical fulfillment. In short, she promises the sort of salvation they seek. Noma's characters want to connect with another and to be human. They want to establish their individuality by a connection with the Other. The Other is the woman and a relationship with this woman would set them free. In attempting to connect with another, their individuality only becomes more obvious. It becomes

obvious by the oppositions that their struggle triggers. The Self, the only reality, looks for salvation outside, in the Other. He looks for salvation in the woman. She becomes a savior, ideal, the ultimate Other.

Kihara Hajime ("Nikutai wa nurete") "wants . . . a body that will correctly lead his body . . . that is, a Beatrice of the flesh" (81-82). He wants a salvation that comes from outside, a guide to lead him to happiness and a sense of correctness. Fukami Shunsuke (*Kurai e*) despairs: if he is going to preserve himself, keep himself going, then, "eventually something from outside, a great big something shooting out rays of light would have to appear" (28). This great big shooting something reminds us, in phallic terms, that the salvation is sexual, and points to the Other, to Woman, to Beatrice, Dante's guide. With Beatrice as the ultimate Woman/Other, we find all the structures we have come to expect: the round-and-round dervish of repulsion and attraction. The Savior and guide is woman, and woman is also sex, the embodiment of sex's fear, of sex's fascination. Woman of the orifices promises to lead one to salvation. Floating down is the Buddha perhaps, or Dante's Beatrice perhaps, to guide the wanderer to liberation.

Woman is a Beatrice to save one from the body that separates the Self from all others. A Beatrice to lead one across the chasm no wider than the space between two bodies clasped together, to grant liberation from the separating reality that prevents one from connecting with the woman who shares one's grief, prevents one from sharing in the grief that she also feels. Yamada Minoru hones in on the recurring phrase in Noma's prose, "to loosen the binding", which sounds like, to him, the "desire to 'want the bindings loosened'" (124). These men want release from their existential oppression and loneliness. They want to be liberated from the restraint that prevents one from becoming the connected individual one can conceive of, can see, but can't become. Kitayama Hajime (*Hōkai kankaku*) wants to be led by Beatrice; Beatrice will

lead one to the perfect land where there is a perfect body. *Kurai e* ends with Fukami Shunsuke's resolution to forge this path from deep within himself. Like Dante's road through Hell, Fukami's is a winding road, circling upward like Brueghel's tower of Babel.

Yamada quotes G.H. Mead who defines salvation as "a sense of tranquillity in one's surroundings." Yamada goes on to ask,

This desire for "tranquillity," in what form is it physically expressed [in Noma Hiroshi's stories]? It is expressed entirely in sex; that is, in the connection with a woman's body I think that the obvious interpretation is that this is connected simply to sex. That is because Noma's desire for tranquillity is expressed physically. This is not an expression for physical desire. This is, literally, the stealthy, but persistent, desire to get one's existence completely nestled inside a woman's body . . . this is not unlike the desire to return to the womb. (Yamada 125)

But liberation never comes.

It all begins and it all ends with the body. When Noma wrote that he was searching for a release from the oppression of the body he was led to this cycle: the oppression of the body drives one closer into the body, but that body resists transgression and the individual is repelled. The desire is to burrow inside but he cannot even draw close to her. The recently experienced battlefield has made these men more painfully aware of the weakness of their bodies; their relations with women also highlight their weaknesses. Liberation is in sight but one can't reach it. It resides in the body of another, but that body prevents it.

This oppressed self desires nothing more than liberation, a release from the forces that hem it in. The method of liberation pursued most relentlessly is carnality itself: sex as a drug, as a means to escape this oppression. It is the contradictory

pursuit of release from the pressures of the body by means of that body, that is, through sex and carnality. (The overlap to Tamura again being clear.) They search for salvation from a body whose needs have been made inescapable by the body of propaganda and the ideology of the nation. This body then promises to be an antidote to the overwhelming body of propaganda they have been forced to swallow.

This fiction about being connected at the physical level returns over and over again to sex and carnality. Here is the overlap with *nikutai bungaku* and also, then, the connection to the fiction of Sartre. Noma's characters are also, and in the same way, trying to throw off the confines of the body by a revel in the body, an exploration of the body. Yet sex alone is never sufficient to restore the lost continuity. "Connecting" via the Gaze is never sufficient; it is as if this would allow their individuality but do nothing to break down the borders of separation that the steely skin imposes. Noma's characters want to occupy the same space as another, to crawl in as far as the womb where it is warm and safe. They want to be one with the Woman/Other. They want no longer to be alone and separate, they desire to be "together." The desire is to break the barrier, the membrane, that separates people. In Yamada's words again it is the "stealthy, but persistent, desire [in Noma's fiction] to get one's existence completely nestled inside a woman's body" (125).

The same sense is strongly conveyed in Sartre's postwar trilogy, when we find that Mathieu desires to be inside Ivich:

She looked at the glass, and Mathieu looked at her. A violent and undefined desire had taken possession of him: a desire to *be* for one instant that distracted consciousness so pervaded by its own color, to feel those long slender arms from within, to feel, at the hollow of the elbow, the skin of the forearm clinging like the lip to the skin of the arm, to feel that body and all the discreet little kisses it so ceaselessly imprinted on itself. To be Ivich and not cease to be himself.

Ivich took the bowl from the waiter's hand and dropped a cube of ice into her glass. (*The Age of Reason* 73)

Sartre also gives an example in *Being and Nothingness* of the difficulty in appropriating another's body, for he finds that, "everything happens as if I wished to get hold of a man who runs away and leaves only his coat in my hands. It is the coat. It is the outer shell which I possess. I shall never get hold of more than a body, a psychic object in the midst of the world" (393). Noma's men too are left with only a skin in their hands, as will become clearer with a reading of his fiction.

II. The Fiction

Kurai e

Noma's earliest short story, *Kurai e*, garnered him his reputation and evidences the themes I have been discussing. *Kurai e* is set among university student life in the 1930s and is a poignant record of the pressures and fears of a group of university students. It makes clear the politicized climate in which they lived. It also made clear, in retrospect, the sort of radical political groups and activities of the campus that were unknown outside of the university--indeed, they were thought to have been quashed by the authorities. This is a difficult work, particularly the opening section, a dense, horrific description of the monstrous bodies and sexualized landscape of a Brueghel painting. Again, the landscape--as body--is set up in opposition to society--ideology,⁶⁷ but in this work, the body is a landscape.

⁶⁷Leftist orthodoxy is also ideology, of course. Noma has as much trouble as Tamura Taijirō in extricating himself from ideological boundaries. We find that in the fight to loosen the grip of ideology they end by positing an ideology of their own. Marxism

This work is not, technically speaking, a Symbolist work, but the influence is clear. Noma repeats images in mantra-like repetition. The reader is faced with a preponderance of images with no apparent referent. Thus we get a sentence like the following (which Noma wrote as one complete sentence, without sentence breaks):

When this art book with its photographic reproductions was exposed to sparks from an oil bomb, page after page of the pictures bound together caught fire in the bomb, charring and peeling in flames that were like some flowing black liquid, and the starfish-like people in the picture, the dog-faced people, the naked people with tails, the people who pressed dark, festering holes between their thighs as if they were something precious, were surrounded by the hot glow of a conflagration that no force, regardless of its size or nature, could hold back, and one after another they were burned to death by the little flames that had already spread under the paper; their flesh, so foul and hateful one could not contemplate it directly, was scorched, and their ugly bodies, convulsed into even uglier shapes by the fire contorting them, for a moment revealed themselves plainly in the flames of the burning paper, their lines standing out blackly like words written in invisible ink that have been brought out on charred paper; and when, moments afterward, these bodies too had turned to fire and disappeared, the whole city of Osaka, from the sky in the south to the sky in the north, was bright with the flush of burning flames, and a storm of engines swept across the sky, spreading heavy, minatory echoes that transmitted the imminent danger of death,

was a particularly harsh ideology and Noma was not always treated kindly by it. By their same token, the “ideology” that destroys bodies in *Kurai e* is certainly that of the government, but the ideology of the Party also is responsible for their plight in many ways.

and layer upon layer of thousands of giant heavy overlapping wings emitted a dull luster as they passed over the densely billowing fires towering over the streets which threw the whole vast city of Osaka into even more brilliant relief in their brightness: and perhaps the groans of the people with those weird holes could then be heard somewhere among the flames, as they faded away, crushed under the weight of the innumerable motors and the great engines sweeping across the sky. (Keene 1: 976)

Kurai e is unusual in Noma's oeuvre for the extent of its symbolist phrasing and convoluted style. For example, the first paragraph is rich with the repetition of adjectivals like "heavy", "dark", and "sterile". This does not seem as important in determining the mood as the repetition of phrases signifying lack, however, for we read, "There were no grasses, there were no trees, there were no buds." Three syllables of each four or five syllable phrase is this "there were no. . ." repeated in a rhythmic cadence. The barrenness that characterizes the story is one of the first impressions the reader receives and one of the strongest and emanates from the repetition of this phrase. The full sentence, however, is "Fukisusabu kumokaze ga kōryō toshite fukisugiru," which is, in literal English, "The violently blowing cloud-wind blows desolately across [the land]." (And this is preceded by "There were no grasses, there were no trees, there were no buds.") It is an intertwined sentence, albeit relatively short, of multiple modifiers. "Blowing" is the main activity of the sentence and the modifiers work to ensure that it is a cold, barren blowing. Together they render an image of exceeding sterility. Further, the modifying "to blow" reflects the modified "to blow" to form a circle of barrenness which sends the entire descriptive sentence rolling along like a tumbleweed. When this same sort of strategy is extended over longer expanses of prose the sense of a difficult jumble is only heightened. In this way the manner of description becomes another facet of the

description. The manner in which the landscape is described becomes itself a descriptive technique and this is the much discussed style.

It is the initial chapters that read like this, and these that are the most well-known of the work. Exasperated readers have commented on these initial chapters that they are “absurdly overwritten” (Rubin, 80) and “Obscurely worded. . . it is hard to understand his sentences unless one rereads them”⁶⁸ (Keene 1: 975). The feeling that seems written right into the prose gave it a palpable existentialist feel. The style is often described as having a “thick” quality, a “sticky” quality (Nishikawa 233, 263). The overlap of sensibility to Sartre’s work becomes immediately clear with such statements, for Sartre wrote himself of the “perpetual apprehension on the part of my for-itself of an *insipid* taste which I cannot place, which accompanies me even in my efforts to get away from it, and which is *my* taste--this is what I have described elsewhere under the name of *Nausea*” (*Being and Nothingness* 338, italics original). Nausea is a sensation associated at a fundamental level with existentialism; related sensations--sticky, clammy--are myriad in Noma’s fiction and underscore this sense.

The novel follows part of a single day with the Kyoto university student, Fukami Shunsuke. We are quickly introduced to the issues that surround him, the problems that hem in his self. We read that “he was living in extremely straightened circumstances, and his hapless romantic involvement was nearing disintegration” (7). He carries in his pocket, for example, a letter he recently received from his father that outlines his mother’s sickness and their need to severely curtail his monthly stipend. Financial woes are the first of Fukami’s problems. We know that his romantic engagements are presenting serious difficulties. His Father’s letter also bears a message related to the third issue that will circle around Fukami’s head throughout the

⁶⁸I do not think, however, that Noma would find in this a criticism.

tale, related to ideological and political involvement. The letter ends with a warning to not become entangled in “ideological” issues: “At the end of the letter was the phrase that his father always included: Be cautious with ideological (*shiso*) issues. Be prudent every day and adhere strictly to a policy of not becoming involved with the Party” (8). Plagued by economic worries, troubled by the state of his romantic involvement, concerned throughout that arrest may visit him or his friends at any time, Fukami makes his way through the day.

He is walking with this letter in his pocket, its contents in his mind, walking to a restaurant where he is about to touch the proprietor for a loan. The proprietor is a loan shark who specializes in small loans to students. In the back of the shop is a group of Fukami’s classmates who proceed to interrogate and pester Fukami. Their taunts concern the lewd, a past visit to a bawdy house. Financial concerns are at the counter, carnal concerns await in the back. Their taunts are also political, but they end with a serious admonition for him to transport to his friend Nagasugi Eisaku:

“Fukami, you going to Nagasugi’s place from here?” asked Koizumi Kiyoshi, leaning forward, in a tone that carried a sudden intimacy. “Be careful over there. That apartment [where he is now] isn’t safe anymore. A damn cop showed up at my place today wanting to know Nagasugi’s recent activities. He claims he is gathering evidence and that the next time Nagasugi isn’t going to get away. He left saying he’ll back him into a corner with his evidence and then arrest him The political types are looking for blood.” (23)

Here are reflected the conflicts in his pocket, the three issues that surround and haunt him: it is financial concern that brought him to this shop, he walks in and is confronted with taunts about sexuality, and sincere warnings concerning the State’s oppression. He leaves and begins the walk to the apartment of Nagasugi Eisaku. He now goes over in his mind the contents of another letter, also in his pocket, received

three days prior from his girlfriend Kitazumi Yuki. She wants to end the relationship. She is scared of him and what he thinks. Ideology frightens her and she wants to withdraw, their bodies are being separated: "I will probably never again draw near the house where the body (*nikutai*) of Kitazumi Yuki resides, never again to that house that holds those hands, those eyes." These eyes are remembered vividly, the look they impart stay with him as they last sat in her small six-mat room and "glared at each other" (25). Kiyama Shōgo will later ask about Kitazumi and this relationship.

Fukami responds that:

I don't know, it's not going well. We got tripped up on issues of the *nikutai*. I can't figure out what it is with physical relationships (*nikutai*). . . . I mean, before, it was my intent to work on my plan for liberating the *nikutai*. I always thought the *nikutai* of the Japanese was twisted. I thought that our *nikutai* was contorted and rotting and I wanted to set it a right and help move ahead. (54-55)

Kiyama understands immediately that this refers to political activity, the Party that Fukami's father warns him against, only too conscious of the police arrests and the government's lack of patience with left-leaning radicals. Thus Kiyama goes on to offer his assessment, theorizing that Kitao Yuki has not left Fukami Shunsuke because of any sexual deficiencies or perversions, not so much because of issues concerning the *nikutai*, not for any reason but ideology: "I don't know if this is truly what Yuki is feeling about this, but here's how it seems to me: In the end, it's your ideology (*shiso*) that's frightening. That is, left-wing ideology. Maybe that's too simple, but that's how it seems" (55). Fukami's ideology was criminal and dangerous; it drove a wedge between these two bodies. The ideological threatens the physical, not only the fear of arrest and jail, but the pressure that this puts on relationships.

Noma's involvement with the Communist Party is important in the initial reception of his work. This work received high praise not just from established

literary figures such as Hirano Ken but also from Miyamoto Yuriko, whose praise was an implicit endorsement by the Japan Communist Party:

What is especially noteworthy of this writer, Noma Hiroshi, is that he does not write either from the subjective viewpoint of a Takami Jun, nor is he stuck on a flat representation in the style of the *Kindai bungaku* group. He has fashioned an objective foundation that serves as the base for his understanding of societal history and he consistently builds upon this understanding. This, of course, is related to the central theme of the work, the anguish of the protagonist Fukami Shunsuke who struggles with the issues of establishing a self (*kojin no kakuritsu*) and completing individuality (*jiko kansei*). With this work Noma Hiroshi has written with a full understanding of the [Marxist understanding of] historical development that informed leftist student activities. (81)⁶⁹

⁶⁹*Kindai bungaku* is the journal published by the *Kindai bungakukai*, the first issue of which appeared in 1946, and the last in 1964. The original board of editors was comprised of Honda Shūgo, Hirano Ken, Haniya Yutaka, Ara Masahito, Sasaki Kiichi, Odagiri Hideo, and Yamamura Shizuka, critics often referred to in this essay. *Kindai bungaku* was less strident in its political aims than was the rival journal, of which Miyamoto was closely associated, *Shin Nihon bungaku*. The premier issue of *Shin Nihon bungaku* was also on newsstands in 1946 and continues to be published in 1997. It is an organ of the Japan Communist Party. Noma joined both the Japan Communist Party and the *Shin Nihon bungakukai* in 1946 and served on the editorial board of *Shin Nihon bungaku* from 1947, along with other Party figures such as Tsuboi Shigeji, Kubokawa Tsurujirō, Nakano Shigeharu, Kubota Masafumi, and Nakajima Kenzō. One then detects thinly veiled party sentiments creeping into

That is, she is saying, Noma proves his communist credentials in this work by displaying a fully developed Marxist ideology. In this sense Noma's work can be characterized as ideology-laden for some of the most ponderous sections and greatest weakness to the overall success of *Kurai e* are the often extended discussions of party ideology and partisan conflicts. Marxism will remain important in Noma's literary career and is always a central concern for him. This bears directly on the topic at hand for Noma followed the work and life of Sartre with interest. This is first because his initial interaction with him was as a contemporary writer working through postwar issues, but also as a novelist working within a Marxist framework. Later in life Noma will criticize Sartre's writing at precisely this point, on Marxist ideology in literary practice. One of Noma's enduring legacies is his formulation of a "totality" in literature, his *zentai shōsetsu*, about which I will discuss more fully below. His "total novel" participates in a dialogue with Sartre; it is also an enduring aspect of his work being voiced at this early stage of his career.

Miyamoto Yuriko follows her initially positive assessment by criticizing the story because it "still carries too much excess baggage. The surface of the prose is thick and clammy. It is unpleasant, like sweating in one's sleep" (82). It is as though Noma caught exactly the sense that Sartre was describing, the "thick and clammy" quality seems to capture a sense of existence that Sartre was also attempting to articulate; Miyamoto's response sounds more like Roquentin's response to the chestnut tree than of a critic in reacting to a fictional representation. Many of Noma's contemporaries found possibilities in this literary difficulty. It's "thick and clammy"

Miyamoto's judgments, which is how her comments were understood by contemporaries (like Honda Shūgo, quoted at the outset) (Hisamatsu 348-349, 588-589; Keene 970-974; Shinchōsha 983-985).

quality, its very opacity and obscurity seemed to permit articulation of the heretofore unutterable. Further, this style seemed the way to express the complicated feelings of the postwar experience. Many writers thought this “thick and clammy” quality was precisely the point, was exactly what was required to express the difficult times, was precisely the method of expression needed that no one had heretofore hit upon. This oppressive sense comes from paragraphs which seem to stretch the limits of the Japanese language. It is not only the description, but the prose itself that assails reason: clauses embedded in embedded clauses work with extended modifiers to stretch the reader’s cognitive limits, making it almost physically impossible to form a coherent image. The descriptions are so abundant and the sentences and paragraphs so long that they present more information than the human brain can physically process. Perhaps this is the point, to embody in the prose the irrationality of the times, to assail the reason, to underscore the difficulties posed to human understanding, to push physical limits. The prose becomes a facet of the description. Representative of these initial reactions is the following by Iwasaki Kunieda:

I read this early collection of short stories in my high school library and was startled by the writing style that allowed for no intimacy, so different from the works I had been reading passionately every day. At that time I did not think about, nor use the word “style”, but I do remember thinking how this work read like a thickly painted canvas. (258)

Even Honda Shūgo, whose praise of this work I have quoted, describes the style as one that “drags one to the depths of a muddy quagmire, that at places is thin and unclear, that at places bogs one down with its weight” (*Monogatari sengo bungakushi* 134). As Nishikawa writes of this style, it “shows [that] he *thinks* (*shikō*) through his body (*nikutai*) and internal organs” (Nishikawa 262; emphasis original). This latter is exactly the sort of visceral response felt by many other readers as well, and it is a

comment that practically replicates Ango's comments on Sartre. There is a visceral quality to *Kurai e* that reaches to the physical construction of the piece, right into the placement of the words on the page.

Kurai e is most representative of this stylistic approach. It is only the initial paragraphs that reflect this obtuse thickness. It is also somewhat different from Noma's other stories in its structure. Whereas the later stories consider a man's search for salvation through the body of a woman in *Kurai e* the represented body is not a woman's actual body but a collection of Brueghel landscapes exuding the same sort of pain and darkness felt by the four students gathered to look at them. These landscapes also exude the physical sensuality of a woman's body. Again, this is the original promise: one is falsely led to hope that the barriers can be broken through because one senses another who shares the same emotions. In later stories that Other will be a lover. Here, it is four students who share amongst themselves this shared pain. The object that allows for sharing is a body (of paintings) that is extremely physical. The volume of Brueghel reproductions contains pictures that are dark and bleak; the four students who come back to this volume again and again are similarly living in a bleak, dark age. They are young, progressive, radical students in a repressive and constricting time.

The promise of salvation resides in women's bodies and entry is promised in bodily orifices. This is the appeal of landscape as body in the opening paragraph of *Kurai e*. The "Dark Pictures" of the title refers to a collection of Brueghel paintings around which are huddled four university students. They stare at the surreal landscapes riddled with orifices. "[The area] around the mouths of these holes [in the landscape] are luscious like lips filled with the excess of life, they are gaping in the

center of numerous grave mounds" (31).⁷⁰ The humanoid figures scampering across this landscape are reduced to sexual organs and sexual urges: "All of these people seem to have no organs, other than sexual organs, which function" (4).

It is in the same vein that we find Ohara Hajime and Yōko groping, in "Nikutai wa nurete", a story I will not discuss at length here, with hand upon hand and lips pressed upon lips. They are groping, physically, for salvation and finding nothing but flesh. Reaching across the chasm to connect they meet only another barrier, the physical barrier, the skin. "As if to clarify a deeper meaning in both their beings he felt they were mutually looking for the direction of the other's life, with their lips" (75).

Thus, in *Kurai e* the object of desire is not so much a physical body as Brueghel's sensuous landscapes pocked with corporeal orifices. Fukami Shunsuke's lover is separated by an hour's train ride to Osaka, the woman's body is separated in a very real way across time and space. Not a physical body but these landscapes with their sensual orifices represent the female body. The four students in Nagasugi Eisaku's room gathered around the exotic abyss represented in these dark landscapes

⁷⁰I will note only in passing that Georges Bataille's understanding of sex and death asserts its relevance in Noma's fiction as it will in Mishima's. The simultaneous attraction and repulsion felt in the face of both orgasm and death, as in religious ecstasy, is erotism and is a characteristic common to both Noma and Bataille. This erotism offers the space where one individual may connect with another, in Bataille's formulation, the only space shared by all humanity. This also strikes me as an apt description of the liberation for which Noma's characters seek (Bataille 1 - 62).

and stare into its vertiginous darkness and together share its promise. The fact that they can share this together is their hope for release.

Noma's experimentation with European literary influences such as stream-of-consciousness was also understood as a technical breakthrough, a way out of the impasse many writers felt after the oppression and deprivation of the war. His often convoluted prose and use of internal monologue shows his debt to writers like James Joyce and Marcel Proust; the Symbolism of Noma's literary apprenticeship under the poet Takeuchi Katsutaro is also visible in the prose of these descriptions. From Joyce he borrowed a stream-of-consciousness narrative to forge a new literary idiom to represent the intellectual crises of this generation. From Proust he borrowed a method to describe and capture the inner workings of a character. Noma explains it this way:

As to why I felt I had to take on the methods of Joyce and Proust as my own, it is because the manner in which they pursued the minute [details of their characters'] internal consciousness struck me as a method to liberate the contents of my own consciousness bound within me by the oppression of the times and the suppression of the *nikutai*. ("Jibun no sakuhin ni tsuite" 256)

In all of this the focus is the *nikutai* oppressed by the State. His fictional enterprise, as stated here, overlaps with Tamura's and Ango's as an exploration of the *nikutai* in order to find a liberation from the over-spiritualized ideology of the war years.

Noma's debt to these writers is great and he discusses them extensively. He is also unstinting in his critique. In "Shōsetsuron (I)", he finds fault with Proust and Joyce (and Gide) at precisely this point he has praised above. Even with all that he has learned from their method, he finds they lack a sufficient tie to the exterior, to an external reality. The characters are all internal with no tie to the external society and

the world around them.⁷¹ In the subsequent essay, “Shōsetsuron (II)”, he writes that it is Sartre who is able to unify the internal and external thus rectifying this particular problem. “Sartre’s project is to see humankind from a place where internal and external is unified. Where he pursues the problem from both the internal and external viewpoint is, provisionally at least, the correct approach.” He is tentative for while Sartre is able to “get beyond” writers who are stuck in their obsession with the internal consciousness like Joyce and Proust, Sartre lacks a proper view of the future: “It is only the person with a clear vision of the future that is able to fully live in the present” (“Shōsetsuron” 34-35).

Noma is even more pointed in an essay written to accompany volume five of *Sartre Complete Works*, as translated into Japanese. In a short essay entitled “Jōkyō” (“Situation”) he writes that only Sartre is able to adequately grasp the *nikutai*:

For example, Gide, in order to extricate himself from the introverted universe of the Symbolist’s pursuit of consciousness, was searching for a restitution of the physical (*nikutai*) as the liberation from desires. While he did in fact realize [the former] he has no grasp of method or language for handling the *nikutai*. . . .

Now Sartre, on account of his bringing about the birth of a language by which to grasp the *nikutai* could go on to make clear the internal description of an individual where the consciousness and the physical (*nikutai*) are unified. Sartre could accomplish this because he turned inside-out the language of the

⁷¹This is, curiously, the criticism most often leveled at the *watakushishosetsu* tradition, a discussion that will become important in the consideration of Oe and Mishima.

Symbolists and their hold on the internalized consciousness and pushed on to a place where he could grasp the *nikutai* internally. (1)

This essay is written late in the 1960s, long after the guiding ideals and obsessions of *Kurai e* had changed into something else. Some might call it the temperance of age. In the same way that he is here quite willing to criticize the Symbolists from whom he borrowed so much, he is also to praise Sartre for uniting the internal with the external. Symbolism and the physicality of the *nikutai* are concerns that remain with him, but now he pursues a unification of the spiritual and the physical, whereas in the earlier stories the intent was, following the intent of Tamura Taijiro as well, to forefront that physical as an antidote to the overly-spiritualized atmosphere of the war years. Noma finds this in Sartre's method as well, for Sartre starts from the body:

This is how Sartre is able to give form and shape to gratuitous acts that originate within an individual and can then make clear the connection to that person [of that action]. It is Sartre that could place the gratuitous act in the midst of everyday activity, situate it and give it substance, that is give it flesh (*nikutaika suru*). . . . Sartre's new method comes in his pursuit and grasp of freedom without excluding the physical (*ningen no nikutai*). ("Jokyo" 1-2)

There is in this the very strong desire to overturn the literature of the past, another preoccupation he shares in common with Tamura Taijiro. Thus, while he concedes that writers such as Yokomitsu Riichi and Kawabata Yasunari had dealt with many of these themes and issues in the past, it was only with writers like Tolstoy and Dostoevsky that he could find what he was searching for. That is, he had to go outside of the Japanese tradition to find models for the sort of expression he was striving for. He had long felt that Japanese literature lacked the method by which he could express what he was feeling. Nor does he stop with this, for when Noma discusses the motivations behind his work, and *Kurai e* in particular, he expresses his

disgust with the literature that preceded him. Noma expresses his frustration with previous Japanese literature as being unable to support one in the darkest hours of Japanese history. This is another way of saying it has no substance, that it is ethereal and ephemeral. In a literary sense Noma is always working against the tradition that he feels binds him, which precludes adequate description for the novel, which crimps the sort of architecture he would like to impart to his novels:

As a high school student I read Natsume Soseki, Shiga Naoya, Tanizaki Jun'ichiro, Yokomitsu Riichi, and Kawabata Yasunari. After that, when I read foreign literature almost exclusively I read writers such as Kobayashi Takiji, Nakano Shigeharu, Miyamoto Yuriko, Sata Ineko. . . . However, as the War grew gradually more and more intense I began to feel very strongly that there was nothing in contemporary Japanese literature that could bear up the heaviness of war. There was not a single element in contemporary Japanese literature which could wipe away the anxiety, pain, and darkness wrought by the War. There was not a single thing that could well up from below in support and correct the contortions, defilements, and ugliness within myself. ("Jibun no sakuhin ni tsuite" 252-253)

This manner of writing was part of his Marxist totalizing vision developing from his concern for the individual: "[My prose style] was a method to liberate the contents of a self-consciousness hemmed in by the self, by the pressure of the times, and by the oppression of the body" ("Jibun no sakuhin ni tsuite" 256). That is, not only is Noma attempting representation via the individual images in his fiction, but by the entire structure of representation. It is important too for its expression of the individual oppressed by the external political situation. This is Miyamoto Yuriko's point when she wrote that Noma "has fashioned an objective foundation that serves as the base for his understanding of societal history which he consistently expands" (81).

He has constructed the base, but it is the total picture he strives to represent. Further, this sort of statement links him directly to the Japanese literary context. Especially with a phrase like “contents of a self-consciousness hemmed in by the self” harks back to the *watakushishōsetsu* tradition, criticized by Marxists and Proletarians alike for its lack of totalizing vision. Autobiographical fiction came under attack precisely because it was introverted and solipsistic, unconcerned about any sort of totality such as society or mass.

Likewise the phrase “oppression of the times, the oppression of the body” affects, among other things, a Proletarian/Marxist sensibility and concern, both for the oppressed body of the exploited worker, as well as the oppressed body of left-wing writers thrown in jail before the war. To speak of a “self-consciousness hemmed in by the self” also reminds one of the image of a soldier holding himself in by his skin, as the canteen holds in its fluids, body fluids, that must be contained. “The oppression of the body, the pressure of the times” reiterates the opposition of wartime government ideology to individual body.

Noma has written that *Kurai e* was written immediately after the war’s end with no consideration as to who would read it. It is hard to imagine writing without an audience in mind, but he claims the issue of readership never came to him. “I wrote this work trying to get in a single grasp all of those things that had piled up within me during the passage of the war years” (“Watakushi no kotoba” 292). He describes the times as claustrophobic, a time when people and friends were separated and jumbled, when one was unable to share one’s thoughts with others. He writes that he carried on discussions inside his head, continuing that at war’s end these discussions that had bounced around inside his head for years, now honed and sharpened by the psychotic schizoid nature of the times, went into *Kurai e*. These words (*kotoba*) are not then single words but expressions and phrases, a private

language almost (again, with resonances of Symbolist poetry) that strike a reader as difficult while carrying a singular descriptive power. The emotional force of these paragraphs captured his early readers and they credit him with being the first to get the feeling of that disjointed age onto paper. This is a product of this punished and tormented style.

Biographical elements also underscore this reading for Noma continues as a committed communist throughout his life and *Kurai e* chronicles the fears of radical students, based on events we know to be largely autobiographical (Keene 1: 975-976). It is also clear that *Kurai e* records his frustration with the war and all the restrictions of the government which waged it. He reminds us as well that it was a work which he held within him for a long time, through the war years, and this too explains the prose style:

Kurai e is based on the radical student activity at Kyoto University; it is a motif that came into being around 1939. I carried all of this around within me during the war; it went everywhere I went. . . . I wrote the rest. . . after having traveled to Tokyo in 1945. With writing this all the pressure that had been bearing down on me during the war was released. Given that the pent-up feelings within me exploded out as I wrote and there are many clumps of words and turbulent phrasings, many areas where the physical “feel” of the work is unpleasant. . . . As I wrote this work there was always in my mind the death of my friend Fuse who died in prison [a political prisoner]. I was going everyday to my desk . . . [with] the smoldering resentment I bore towards those that killed him. He appears in this work with the name Kiyama Shōgo. (“Jibun no sakuhin ni tsuite” 253)

That is, the much commented roughness of the work is a direct result of the war. More to the point of this discussion, a prime motivation is the anger and resentment

towards “those that killed him.” This can refer to none other than the government that harassed these students, rounded up suspected left-wing radicals, imprisoned them, and killed them. He is emphasizing the individual as a protest against the imprisoning nation, emphasizing how the *nikutai* is in opposition to the *kokutai*.

This is borne out even in the rudimentary outline of the novel. Noma wrote that he wanted to liberate the self-consciousness from the pressure of the times and in these times that pressure was the pressure of ideology. It is ideology that the comrades in the noodle shop use to badger Fukami Shunsuke; ideology that his father warns him to be on his guard against; ideology that gets them all arrested; ideology that leads to the death of the other three in prison. This is articulated in a reflective passage later in the novel when Fukami thinks back on those days and on his friends:

Right after the beginning of the Pacific War Kiyama Shōgo resolved to avenge Nagasugi Eisaku’s death. He became active in handing out leaflets [critical of the government and its actions]. He was eventually rounded up after three days in hiding; he died in jail soon after. Prior to that time, right after his graduation, Nagasugi was arrested. He refused to renounce his Communist ideals (*tenko*) and after a year, died in jail. Hayama Jun’ichi was sent to the front immediately following graduation but was rounded up while a soldier. He was sent back to the mainland on an airplane but he too then died in a military prison. The war railroaded over the expectations and predictions that Nagasugi and Hayama made concerning the war, continuing on its way. They each expended all their energy and collapsed. It was much later that Fukami learned of their deaths. That was after he returned home following three years of military service. He himself was

picked up shortly after that. Fukami renounced his political beliefs and went on to work in a munitions plant to get enough money to survive. (53)⁷²

In these times it is ideology, not sex, that is criminal. In Ōe Kenzaburō's words it is the "monster of 'ideology,' and nothing else that smashed their love to smithereens" ("Kaisetsu" 371). Kiyama Shōgo theorizes that Kitao Yuki has left Fukami Shunsuke not because of any sexual deficiencies or perversions, not for any reason but ideology. "In the end, it's your ideology that's frightening. That is, left-wing ideology" (55). His ideology was criminal and dangerous; it drove a wedge between these two bodies. It is always the ideology of the national body that destroys relationships in the physical individual body. The *nikutai* is set up in opposition to the *kokutai*, two sides of the same coin, and issues of ideology are translated into issues of physicality. It is Fukami's ideology, threatened by the ideology of the state, that destroys their physical relationship.

Fukami Shunsuke feels "the tension of the skin that exists in self-consciousness and is in the other's consciousness" (9). A membrane exists between persons, a chasm that cannot be crossed, no matter how much one wants to establish contact with the other. The protagonist of "Futatsu no nikutai" feels keenly the "tough, steely membrane" that is stretched between him and his lover. This membrane separating individuals is the foundational reality for Noma's characters; they are constantly racked against this divider, the wall that separates one from the other and renders any promise of continuity an illusion.

Near the end of *Kurai e*, Fukami Shunsuke accompanies Kiyama Shōgo on the cold walk home and Fukami Shunsuke explains what happened in his relationship with Kitao Yuki: "Our bodies (*nikutai*) tripped us up. You know, I know longer have

⁷²This translation is slightly abridged.

any idea what the "body" (*nikutai*) means" (54). No one in these stories ever does, but that diminishes neither the body's promise nor its appeal.

These characters find that the body, this landscape that tempts them with promises of liberation, also revolts them. In the same way that Yuki ("Nikutai wa nurete") writes in her diary, "My lips felt like two slugs emitting light" (95), the students in *Kurai e* find that the figures in the Brueghel landscapes are reduced to sexual organs and sexual urges as is the landscape itself. The landscapes are dotted with funnel-shaped holes and,

the mouths of these holes, lustrous like lips filled with the excess of life, open in the very middle of various grave mounds, these holes, to say it another way, give the sensation of waiting, heavy, filled with licentiousness, entirely like some living thing, like mollusks, opening their mouths across the landscape. And there, without crotches, with sex organs only, again and again, there appear to be buried the strange bodies of women. (3)

Something is promised in this landscape as body and the students keep turning back to look. There is also something here that they find very disturbing. It fascinates, it repels. These humanoid creatures scuttling across the landscape are horrific and unsettling in their pain. Yet the students also see themselves, pained creatures whose sexuality is foregrounded, sexuality that seems to promise some sort of release while becoming all-consuming.

Fukami Shunsuke realizes in retrospect that the simple act of sharing and cowering around these paintings allowed these four to be as close as disparate individuals are ever able to become:

The spiritual atmosphere of that small six mat room of Nagasugi Eisaku's was such that they did not each melt part by part into a single entity because our differing perceptions, different colorings, remained; yet from the point of

anguish [that they found in the paintings] an intimate communion, a mutual touch, a mutual circulation, a tumid intimate something filled the room to overflowing. (31)

The collection of paintings are an erotic object that draws them in fascination while repelling them in disgust. They cannot bear to look very long on these paintings:

because looking at these reproductions was quite unpleasant. All who looked on these reproductions were ineluctably forced to recall the oppressiveness of their individual positions in society, their relations at home, their interactions with various women, the ideologies they each held. . . . [For Fukami Shunsuke] the images in that collection of many people in oppressive darkness, emitting something like a groan, with pain and anguish, caused him to poignantly feel his own sorrow. Even when he thought to himself that “tonight I won’t look at them” he was drawn by a mysterious power and found himself turning those pages. (7)

When the Marxist critic Honda Shūgo read this work he responded that the search for a self as exemplified by the protagonist of *Kurai e* pointed the way to new possibilities in relation to Communism, a third way that was neither martyr nor apostate (the choices the official ideology allowed) (“*Kurai e* to tenkō” 351). Hirano Ken follows with the comment that this work is an individual synthesis of symbolist poetry and revolutionary activism. This is to say that Noma Hiroshi forged a new idiom that resolved some of the most troubling issues of the postwar literary scene. These are not only, as these critics are pointing out, issues that address the conflict between the individual and ideology (whether that of a fashionable Marxism or the establishment Nationalism/Fascism), but that describe a creative, individual (independent and non-conformist) self in the new situation of the postwar generation. As in much of Noma’s work one finds very little in the way of plot. The work

captures in poignant detail the loneliness and alienation, the money worries, the concerns about friends and lovers, the fear and fascination of sex in the world of these college students. It sometimes tediously records conversations laden with political debates, but its tone—dark and brooding—caught the mood of the time.

The work ends on a note entirely appropriate to this discussion, with Fukami turning over and over in his mind a phrase that has been with him throughout the work, “shikata no nai tadashisa”, a correctness about which nothing can be done; there is nothing for it but to continue on his path of righting the wrongs of the world. This is the path, the correctness that he is condemned to, for which and about which nothing can be done. He has chosen the path of political activity. He knows there is a method of action, things he must do as he walks into the future like a condemned man, dragging his feet. The choices that lie ahead contain actions he must take, actions he even desires to undertake, yet which are also unavoidable. He is condemned to the freedom of the choices before him.

Hōkai kankaku

To turn to a different story, Oikawa Ryūichi, the protagonist of *Hōkai kankaku* (*A Sense of Disintegration*), is, like so many of Noma’s protagonists, a young man returned from the battlefield to the ravaged landscape of Japan. The story opens with him about to leave his student rooms to meet his lover for whom he has no great depth of feeling. It is a relationship only because there is physical exchange. He is detained by the landlord: another student has hung himself in a room down the corridor and the landlord needs him to keep watch while she goes to call the police. This situates the narrative, for from this point on he is suspended between life and death.

His relationship with his lover is little more than physical, and hardly even that. The war has left no real possibility for exchange or sharing with another

individual. The body defines the individual and forms its boundaries; it prevents the individual from connecting with an Other. The war experience is never far in the background; it is the source of this disillusion. Their bodies were dismembered literally and physically--Oikawa Ryūichi has lost three fingers in a suicide attempt on the battlefield. These bodies have been placed ("left behind" is perhaps more literal) in the postwar situation with its difficulties and disillusionment and they find they cannot live. Neither can they die. Death has been seen, and very nearly experienced on the battlefield; it no longer holds the Romantic sense of escape that it once did. Death is no better, certainly no worse, than their lives as they live them.

He walks in the room: the dead man hangs from the rafters and children's voices waft through the open window. The happy chirping of life mixes with the death in the air. Where Kihara Hajime and Yūko ("Nikutai wa nurete") felt existence in their lips, eyes, and palms Oikawa Ryūichi feels it in the scars in his hand, the stubs of two fingers lost on the battlefield, now hard and tingling as he faces this corpse. He feels in these stubs the remains of what once existed. It is not unlike touching death. The body suspended from the rafters reminds him of death on the battlefield and his own attempted suicide. The tingling in fingers dead, fingers not there, reminds him of the woman he is about to meet, who has touched him there, and asked about them. These fingers stiff and tingling become phallic; missing (in lack) they are sensual. Battlefield memories always rise up and are a hindrance to any relationship.

Oikawa Ryūichi remembers sitting behind a horse stable on a Chinese battlefield. A grenade is on his lap and his hand is on the pin. He then finds himself "lying face down [when] a tepid something covers his face and he senses a moment of stickiness, as though his body has been forced into a liquid like glue, with nothing to grab onto. It is as though his consciousness and the fluids of his body are flowing together" (181). This white stickiness is the nausea Sartre described, the stickiness of

existence. It is the clamminess that Miyamoto experienced in the prose. It is replicated in the condensed milk heated up and passed around the small room as four students peer into the abyss of a Brueghel painting. In *Kurai e* we found Fukami awaiting that “ something from outside, a great big something shooting out rays of light would have to appear” (28) another phallic image appropriate here. This sense of disintegration is both recoiled from and desired, like sex, like death. There is again fascination and repulsion. Sex's orgasm also provides a temporary release and respite, the release of a drug induced hallucination. Barriers break down and borders are obliterated, two individuals may be able to connect with another, but one also loses one's bearings. It is ultimately impossible and barren.

The strands of sex and death are tightly woven in *Hōkai kankaku*. Oikawa Ryūichi sees a dead man hanging in front of him while hearing sounds of life, of children playing in the street. Down the hall wives are cooking suppers for their families. They are cooking (dead) fish (bodies) for living (bodies). He is gripped by the raw smell, the living smell of dead and dried fish. It is a paradox that isn't. The fish smell: "He realized this smell was similar to the smell from one part of Etsuko's body. Something in his body was beginning to swell. Desire began to move, openly. Something was filling his body" (184). A dead body and the sounds of live bodies, the live smell of dead fish bodies mixed with the live fish smell of a woman's body. Death prompts desire, and that desire is described in sensual terms.

“Kao no naka no akai tsuki”

Kitayama Toshio's experience in “Kao no naka no akai tsuki” (“A Red Moon in Her Face”, 1947) replicates that of other Noma characters. Kitayama finds himself attracted to the beauty of a widow named Horikawa but more to the ache and the pain he finds in her face, a pain and ache of the same sort he finds in his own soul. The

pain found in another extends a possibility that one may connect with another, that their may be some release from one's own loneliness.

Kurako Horikawa, a widow, had a kind of painful expression on her face. . . . [H]er face gave an impression of a slight distortion, for something had robbed it of the full and natural growth of life. . . . Toshio Kitayama had to admit that the expression of that face gradually stole into the depths of his heart the more he saw her. . . . He knew that her form, which seemed drenched in sadness, resurrected and drew out painful memories from his past. To be sure, her face had a beauty that resonated with the pain within him, yet he could not understand why her face nestled into his heart in this way. In any case, that face of her's touched him deeply. (35-36)⁷³

The loneliness he feels is reflected in the face of another (the Other); she promises the possibility to free himself from his oppression.

Something physical touches something spiritual. The possibility of connecting with another human being is extended, the chance to shake off the loneliness mantling his body. They are riding the train together. They had been waiting and waiting but their train did not come. They board a train (Yamanote line) going the long way, the opposite way, around. The Yamanote line is appropriate, being the train that travels in a circle in central Tokyo: all Yamanote trains go to the same place, even when running in opposite directions. Since the Yamanote train is circular, it also means it is always going where it has been, going nowhere. Around and around, this movement replicates the action of these stories, the futility of all action. It reminds one of the circles of life and death, of the circles in the landscape that open *Kurai e*. On this train

⁷³Unless noted otherwise, the translations from “Kao no naka no akai tsuki” are by Kinya Tsuruta.

Kitayama looks at her face, the face and body in which resides pain and suffering like his own.

Kitayama Toshio saw Horikawa Kurako raise her head and look in his direction. Her pale face floated in the dimly lit space in front of him. He was staring directly into her face . . . he was sure that it was agony brought on by the war that he saw on her face. He thought how he would like, somehow, to enter into that agony. If, in a person like himself, there remained any truth or sincerity, he would like it to touch her agony. . . . If, in that way, two peoples hearts could face each other and exchange agonies, or, if in that way, two people could exchange secrets of existence, or, if a man and a woman could, in that way, show each other truth . . . then life would hold new meaning. . . . But, he realized that for him that sort of thing was impossible. (136; my translation; ellipses original)

It is impossible because in the end he cannot take the step off the train with the woman for whom he feels this attraction and affinity. He stays on the train to travel back/forward to somewhere he has already been. Separated by the pane of glass, the red moon that represents the past war spreads across her face, splitting it apart. A pane of glass, a hard steely membrane, the experiences of the war, physicality, insure that two beings remain irrevocably separated. The past battlefield has made the self's aloneness and individuality only too clear, it now obstructs the salvation that is in sight.

This is the original point of contact and the original illusion: that feelings can be shared and that contact can be made based on those feelings. A promise is offered, but it cannot be fulfilled; one is left alone and the chasm cannot be crossed. "Pain draws two people together [in these stories] but pain also prevents two people from connecting" (Watanabe, *Noma Hiroshiron* 109). That original point of contact is the

body which seems to offer the salvation for which these men search, the desire for liberation prompts the desire to crawl bodily inside the body of the woman/Other, but her very body prevents it, her body's borders are firm, the skin that stretches between two people seals them in their individuality, in the loneliness. The body is all there is. Seeming to offer salvation, it imprisons them.

In Noma's stories this Self-Other split yields images of the Self being literally pulled apart, whether by buckboards pulling in "the ancient practice of tying a criminal's legs, each to a different wagon, and pulling them apart" or by octopus suckers. Establishing a relationship in these times moves beyond the merely impossible, it becomes a of cruel cosmic joke. The locus is the body and the body gets pulled apart. In any other time sex would have allowed easy communion but the war has destroyed that possibility. Nothing is easy any longer, all is fraught with difficulty. Noma wrote that he wanted to liberate the self-consciousness from the pressure of the times, and in these times that pressure was the pressure of ideology. "Why is a man's body wrenched apart in this way? Because the woman is frightened by his physical desire, and frightened by his left-wing ideology" (Watanabe, *Noma Hiroshi ron* 97). Ideology (ideals) and love are the two principles threatening to pull them apart at their legs. The body of a lover, tangible, is also the body in ideology. This is an image reinforcing the sense articulated by Tamura Taijiro, that ideology has been emphasized at the expense of the material body. The insubstantial has been stresses at the expense of the substantial, with serious consequences for life and living. The national foray into war established a structure that threatens to crush the individual.

Two bodies are separated in these stories by nothing more than the distance between two bodies pulled close in a desperate exchange. All the more desperate and harrowing because in getting so close one cannot deny the chasm and the stubborn

divider that separates Self from Other, Self from saving Other. The divider is the skin: the most elastic of barriers proves the strongest. We find the same in the experience of the protagonist of "Futatsu no nikutai":

The train became increasingly crowded and Mitsue's body was pushed firmly against his. While he touched Mitsue's body he sensed between their two bodies, pressed together, something transparent. He sensed that a thin steely membrane stretched between his skin and her skin and firmly separated them.

(64)

This membrane separating individuals is the foundational reality for Noma's characters. It is a wall that separates one from the other and renders any promise of continuity an illusion. Further,

He felt that her body feared his body. But no, that's not it either: What Mitsue feared was not this mortal flesh (*shintai*); he knew that she was fearful of the ideology that he embraced. He knew that she feared the ideology that was within his physical body (*shintai*). From this body of her's he could tell that his ideology was beginning to weigh heavily on her body. (64)

She fears not him so much as what he thinks. Much is made of her fear of him, of his radical thought, that will likely get them imprisoned or killed. It is the same fear that frightened off Fukami Shunsuke's lover. This is where the national body impinges on the physical, individual body because what he thinks is not abstract but something concrete. It is dangerous. Further, it too is enveloped by the body, it is "within" his physical body. The body is the canteen holding in the vital fluids, the vital ideals, but also preventing a commonality larger than that one individual. That individual is then left damned to the freedom of his thought and choices, damned to know none other than himself.

Ideology is likewise a truck that runs one down, the truck threatening to run down Yuki Osamu ("Futatsu no nikutai") and at the same time forcing him back close to his lover, forcing him back close to this woman's body. The scene replicates the action of the entire story. Two lovers, scared of each other's bodies while hoping to find liberation in those bodies, are not talking to each other. They have quarreled and they are disagreeable, they are afraid of their carnal desires. As they cross a street a truck barrels down upon them, practically running over Yuki Osamu. The woman saves him by pulling him back to the curb. The ideology in the background of these stories is not unlike this truck: the force that would divide them is also the catalyst to push them back tight against each other.

These are the struggles that the times present, that is, the ideology of the times, threatening to crush one underfoot like a squirming frog. These are the pits and orifices open throughout the landscape(s), the *topoi* of the times and the stories. Wombs, lips, vulva, ideological pits to fall into, where the self is smashed to smithereens. These orifices promise liberation, they prove to be nothing at all, a black hole. The body that promises communion prevents it in its structure. That physical body contains thoughts and ideas that the national body threatens to squash like a frog. This physical threat also squashes their chances for physical communion.

Wartime and war glorified the body while urging its suppression and control. Precisely because it was wartime however, the body demands a central focus:

In that idealistic age of the [Second World] War, in that age when in the name of idealism the body was galloped off towards death, terms we find in Noma's stories--"incomplete," "anguish," "darkness," "twisted," "dirty," "ugly"--were forced onto the body. The body is foundational to individual existence, but in an age when it was forbidden, in any sense, to focus on the individual the body cries even more urgently, "I want to live." (Watanabe *Noma Hiroshi ron* 96)

Again, this is the point consistent throughout these writers. By emphasizing the physical, the individual can return to the natural state, the truly human existence that is more than object. The nation has forced an unnatural and impossible plan by de-emphasizing the physical in wartime, at precisely the time that the physical gets emphasized on its own accord by the demands of everyday existence. These writers are in this way emphasizing the physical body as a reaction to the national body. Thus by stressing an ideological body the nation effects and emphasis on the physical individual body.

III. Zentai Shōsetsu

As Noma's literary career advanced his novels became noticeably longer. This too is an outgrowth of his novelistic vision. With the intricate structure of nineteenth century French fiction (Balzac and Zola) as an ideal, Noma attempted to grasp the entirety of reality, not just a segment or a slice of it and to grasp it scientifically. This literary enterprise was framed by his activism and his Marxism. He was trying to capture, to relate, the total human being in his novels. It is, in some ways, a counterpart to the project of Joyce, though different in direction: Joyce, trying to capture all that makes up his character, goes further inward to deeper and more basic psychological depths while Noma, starting at a similar place with stream-of-consciousness techniques in his short stories, goes further outward, trying to capture all the elements that make up his characters (more Marxian than Freudian).

Noma was later to call this the *zentai shōsetsu* perhaps best translated as the "novel of entirety." At first he referred to it as the *sōgō shōsetsu*. It was intended to encompass a thorough description of mankind by describing him from three different planes, or aspects, of his existence: the physiological (*seiri*), the psychological (*shinri*), and the societal (*shakai*), and render an image that unifies all of these. As

Suzuki Sadami rephrases it, it is a method to describe 1) the individual consciousness which is limited by 2) the body via 3) society, which constrains all of these factors (146). In another phrasing, we find there were three impulses that moved him at the early stage of his writing career: one, an awareness of the limitlessness of spirit as he faced the “poetic” universe; two, the sexual universe (which is the desire for women); and three, the economic universe, economics in relation to society (Suzuki “Noma Hiroshi no ichi” 154; see also Oda 194-195). *Hōkai kankaku* is an early work that conforms to this novelistic method as an early attempt to capture “all” of an individual dismembered by the war. To reformulate it in terms of the three points laid out above, it is a description of (1) the consciousness of the main character and (2) his body which limits it, all of which is circumscribed by the society (3). He describes these impulses as bouncing into and striking one another with a force that threatened to rip him apart. These three impulses were more than passing youthful passions, they proved to be concerns with which Noma would wrestle for many years. In addition to the concerns themselves, this sense of conflicting forces striking one another and threatening to tear the body asunder pervades his work. In a more general sense, sex and the body in opposition to thought and ideology (the physical in opposition to the ideological) battling each other for precedence are overarching themes throughout his lifework. This struggle is rooted in the physical. It is also economic. These dual focuses reflect the Marxist (and an underlying Proletarian) sensibility that informs his work (Nishikawa 261). It also is the ground that furthers the concerns of *nikutai bungaku*. This battleground also defines the postwar situation, and Noma Hiroshi was the first to engage these themes so powerfully. Herein lies much of his importance to his generation. However, any discussion of the *zentai shōsetsu* is further complicated by the fact that Noma himself never formally defined what he meant by the term. He wrote about and around the issue and considered his novels

attempts to realize the project but stopped short of a coherent and definitive discussion of his terms.⁷⁴

I note this here because discussions of the *zentai shōsetsu* comprise a central component of most discussions of Noma's fiction. It is also intriguing because it is an attempt at a consistent and thoroughgoing Marxist approach to literature on Noma's part. It is also the basis from which Noma will attack Sartre in his 1969 study (*Sarutoruron*). He accuses Sartre in that work of not being sufficiently complete nor consistent in his Marxist-informed novelistic projects. Noma finds Sartre's "totality" not nearly "total" enough. His study of Sartre is not a discussion of Sartre's philosophy as much as a highly critical assessment of his literary method. This project underscores the point at which Sartre was initially received in the Japanese literary community: not as a philosopher, and not only as a novelist, but as a thinker concerned with novelistic method. (Likewise, when Mishima discusses Sartre, his fullest discussion centers on dramatic method.) Noma would grant importance only to the imagination because this is the activity previous to the split between image and

⁷⁴Noma's multi-volume work, *Seinen no wa* is the work most often discussed in relation to the *zentai shōsetsu* as being the work that is clearly an attempt to write a "complete novel." This work is often described as a "monster novel" (*kyōhen shōsetsu*, in contrast to the usual delineations for fiction *chōhen* or *tanpen shōsetsu*, for longer and shorter works, respectively) (Kindai sakka kenkyū jiten 315). It's mammoth size is largely attributable to the desire to capture absolutely everything to render a complete description. The first volume appeared in 1946; the final, sixth volume appeared in 1971. For a complete discussion, see Watanabe Hiroshi's article "Seinen no wa' wa ikan naru imi de zentai shōsetsu ka" and also Treat, *Writing Ground Zero*, 386-387.

perception. Imagination reaches deeper and is more primitive and basic than sense perception. This is a move that makes the individual interactive with the object of sight. He is not just receptive, passively, but active, playing a creative role in the images received. That is, images are not reliant on what one perceives, out there, but on images that begin at some deeper place within the individual. Noma does not want to give up interactive creative control; he discusses Sartre as being in a position similar to Mauriac where the author is in the position of God, but debilitated, unable to fully explain or analyze the characters in his own novels. Sartre at first attempted to capture man via the imagination, moving onto wider concerns of action and act, from where he found that it is through desire that one can most fully grasp, or describe, the individual and overcome the self. Noma's critique of this point is that while entering deeply into issues of human desires Sartre overlooked human activity; that is, he didn't account fully for the connection between human desire and activity. Further, he failed to adequately implicate the oppression inherent in the capitalist system (which highlights the contradiction between labor(er) and desire(er)). This is to criticize Sartre for not being faithful to his Marxist roots, for to overlook the oppressive relationships of producer to laborer is, effectively, to overlook everything. Noma, in this discussion, mentions his own project of the *zentai shōsetsu* and we can see how it too has evolved. He is no longer trying to retrieve and include everything external, but is now trying to include the unknowns, the unconscious as well, because only by accounting for the unknown and underlying can we know why a person (character) acts in certain ways, or what it is that motivates him or her to act.

As I have outlined in the previous chapter, issues of the body comprised a critical issue at this time and was also the point of departure of discussions of the translated short stories of Sartre that were then appearing. Noma's study of Sartre is largely critical of Sartre's literary technique. Many of Noma's literary theories were

consciously set up against those of Sartre. It is his concern for issues of the body that roots him firmly among the postwar writers. After the disillusion of the surrender, the hoax of sacrificing all to the wartime ideology (*kokutai* or “national body”) and ignoring one’s physical body (*nikutai*) became poignantly clear.

Noma’s interaction with Sartre follows the chronology discussed above. The initial interactions with Sartre in Japan focused on the literature while only in a later decade will the more formal aspects of his writing be the focus of inquiry. That is, Noma’s introduction to Sartre was through the fiction, and that only after *Kurai e* was in print. The philosophical writings of Sartre only became available much later. Ōe Kenzaburō, however, as we shall see in the next chapter, had access to both the philosophy and the fiction well before launching on his literary career which adds another important perspective to this literary interaction with Sartre.

Chapter 4: Ōe Kenzaburō: The Body Imprisoned

What I constantly aim at across my experiences are the Other's feelings,
the Other's ideas, the Other's volitions, the Other's character.
This is because the Other is not only the one whom I see but the one who *sees me*.
Being and Nothingness

They had abruptly become aware that they were undergoing a sort of
incarceration under that blue dome of sky.
The Plague

I. Introduction

Ōe Kenzaburō is very likely the most important literary figure and intellectual force in Japan since the Pacific war. The imaginative power displayed in his fiction--“gorgeous energy” in John Nathan’s words (“Introduction” x)--complemented by his consistent and uncompromising involvement in social issues have invigorated the intellectual *milieu* ever since his dramatic explosion onto the literary scene as a university student in 1957. He received the Akutagawa Prize the following year, in 1958, which gave him what amounts to the official sanction of the literary establishment. He has proven to be one of the most consistently politically-engaged writers of postwar Japanese letters, retaining his stance as a 1960s left-wing radical

even into the decidedly unpolitical decades to follow.⁷⁵ Masao Miyoshi, one of Ōe's staunchest champions (his most recent book is dedicated to him) has written that, "Ōe Kenzaburō seems the most outstanding of those consistent intellectuals who continue their critical examination of self and society with unrelenting thoroughness. There are moments when it looks as though Japan's critical consciousness lives in Ōe's work alone" (*Off Center* 26). Hosea Hirata writes in his recent essay on Ōe that "It is now hardly arguable that Ōe Kenzaburō, born in 1935, is the most important writer to emerge in postwar Japan. Looking back at his long career as a writer, we are amazed to see how his literary output repeatedly and almost single-handedly infused a renewed energy into the often stagnating literary world of modern Japan" ("Masturbation" 93). Further, he writes, it was Ōe Kenzaburō who "began to link the disparate discourses" of "the sexual, the political, and the literary" ("Masturbation" 91).

Ōe's work is volatile and it remains explicit and shocking; it was all the more so when it exploded onto the literary scene of the late 1950s. The fact that Ōe was still a university student at the time of this debut gave him all the advantage of youth, an *enfant terrible*, which contributed to the image of the unexpected and radical. His fiction is explicit not only in its political ramifications but also in its consistent pairing of the--up to that point at least-- "disparate discourses" of politics and sex. Sex in Ōe's writings is almost always violent and brutal; it is almost always juxtaposed with the political. More precisely yet, he is scandalous for his sacrilegious (in the Japanese context) proclivity for pairing sexual activity, usually deviant, with the emperor and

⁷⁵James Sterngold captures exactly the sense of anachronistic dislocation that Ōe embodies by entitling his *New York Times* article, "Japan Asks Why a Prophet Bothers."

emperor worship (Nathan, "Introduction" xii-xv; Napier, "Death and the Emperor" 71-73). His earliest work is shot through with issues of sex and politics. Much of the energy and power of this work derives from his treatment of these issues, from this consistent and often rough juxtaposition. It is at this juncture that Susan Napier contrasts Ōe's work with one of his closest rivals, Mishima Yukio, for "They are two of the most important and controversial writers of postwar Japan, writing fiction that was sophisticated enough for the critics but, at the same time, entertaining enough to gain a wide readership" (*Escape from the Wasteland* 3). Ōe's most recent media splash followed his award of the 1994 Nobel Prize for literature. He returned from Sweden and subsequently refused the Order of Merit conferred by the Emperor, the highest civilian award in the country. He claimed that accepting the award would be a disavowal of all he has stood for (Sterngold 3).

In this essay I want to discuss Ōe Kenzaburō as an existentialist writer. In the previous chapter I discussed Noma Hiroshi and his work as being existentialist by which I meant (limiting the discussion to the postwar Japanese context) a writer of issues of the body. "Literature of the body," the sobriquet under which existentialism was conflated in late 1940s Japan is a theme evident in Noma Hiroshi's earliest fiction: it continues in the early work of Ōe Kenzaburō. I have suggested that Noma's fiction of the 1940s is more visceral and therefore less philosophically rigorous *vis-à-vis* Sartre's work than that of the writers of later generations, such as Ōe. Ōe perhaps best illuminates this generational distinction. As a student of French literature at Tokyo university Ōe had access to philosophic works of Sartre, for example, that were still unavailable to Noma when he began his writing career at war's end. Ōe's generation is the 60s generation, the generation when existentialism became something of a fad. When Ōe began writing Sartre's fiction, as well as much of his philosophy, was available in Japan in the original and in various translations. That Ōe borrowed

much from Sartre seems quite obvious. (Nishikawa Nagao echoes the responses of many when he notes that reading Oe reminded him of reading Sartre, 330; see also Karatani, “Taidan” 40.) Ōe has made Sartre’s work his own, turning Sartre’s concerns on the lathe of his own workshop to create a distinct object, in conformance to his own design (Tsuge, “Jitsuzonshugi” 145).

Existentialism was the rage in Japan of the 1950s and 1960s. It exploded into intellectual discussion and discourse, as evidenced by the work of Sakaguchi Ango, Tamura Taijirō, and Noma Hiroshi, to name only those discussed in this essay. It was seen throughout this time as not only being on, but being, the cutting-edge of culture:

The literature and philosophy of Existentialism exerted a great influence on the work of a writer the importance of Ōe Kenzaburō. In a related sense it possessed the power to change the basic nature of Japanese literature. The fact is that at the time [the 1950s and 1960s] Existentialism also had a rather shallow aspect for whether one understood it or not was immaterial, but one could not be an intellectual if not reading Sartre. The final result of all this was that “Existentialism” became a favorite word thrown around by journalists. It became a time when the phrase pushed its way into all sorts of conversation, thus one could “existentially” drink sake and “existentially” leave a girlfriend. For a while there in the literary universe of Japan the sun rose and set with Jean-Paul Sartre. (Kanaseki, “Yonjō” 13)

Tsuge Teruhiko also notes that Existentialism was a fad immediately after the Second World War, throughout the world, and in Japan as well. It was not superseded even with the great importance that Structuralism played in Japan in the 1960s. Sartre’s visit to Japan late in 1966 along with Simone de Beauvoir also reinvigorated the discussions about Existentialism. It exerted a strong influence across the spectrum of

Japanese culture and thought through the end of the sixties, not losing its appeal nor its force until late in the sixties when there was a significant reaction to all that was postwar. But Tsuge is also quick to note that the meaning of “existentialism” is by no means stable, and borrowing the famous quip of Maruyama Keizō in relation to Structuralism in Japan, writes that there exist as many existentialisms as there do existentialists (“Jitsuzonshugi” 126).

Ōe’s writings overlap with this history, as is evidenced by the journalistic writings he produced throughout this time. In particular stands out a “Portrait of Sartre” that describes a meeting with Sartre in Paris in 1962.⁷⁶ A number of articles resulted from Sartre’s visit to Japan in 1966 as well. These articles, as the bibliography shows, focus on the role of intellectuals and their place in modern society, the subject of Sartre’s Japanese lecture series. The role of the intellectual overlaps with concerns of great interest to Japanese writers and thinkers, in particular the proper public role of the intellectual in contemporary society, as we have seen. These 1966 discussions overlap with concerns that Ōe has continually taken up in his writing and thinking: the role of the intellectual, the proper response to nuclear weapons, and Hiroshima.

Ōe has written much concerning Noma’s work and the influence and sense of connection he feels to that generation. Ōe has been consistently enamored of this postwar generation of writers and has continually worked to be counted among their

⁷⁶First published as “Sarutoru no shozo” in the March 1962 issue of *Sekai*. It appeared in English as a “Portrait of Jean-Paul Sartre” in the July 1962 issue of *Orient/West*.

number.⁷⁷ Thus, while Ōe's work displays his reading and absorption of Sartre's philosophy, it builds on and continues the discussions that were articulated by Noma, Tamura, Ango, and others immediately after the end of the war. His obsession with the physical continues a lineage articulated by the previous, postwar, generation he so admires. Herein lies the importance of Ōe's work to this discussion: while he is of a distinctly different generation than those postwar writers, he nonetheless continues the concerns of physicality and carnality that are evidenced in postwar fiction. He writes in the lineage of the discourse on physicality which drew much initial inspiration from the short fiction of Sartre and continues the tendency. At the same time he infuses his knowledge based on the recently accessible philosophical writings of Sartre. Sartre's philosophy, as articulated through the Self and Other come together with the discourse on the body I have been discussing.

Again, when I speak of existentialism in this chapter I am referring to a continued obsession with issues of the body and also with an acute awareness of the construct of the Self/Other as formulated by Sartre. Given that a community of well-informed readers of Sartre was now in place, my limiting the discussion to these issues necessarily overlooks many facets of both existentialism and Sartre. I am limiting the discussion in this way for these prove to be issues of consistent concern

⁷⁷Ōe has made explicit attempts to be counted among the postwar generation of writers. In his telling, the postwar writers were motivated by social issues and a sense of responsibility. Ōe's interest in this generation of writers provides an important wedge to pry into his thought, but I will only touch on this below. For a more complete discussion of this confluence, see the work of Tsukiramu Toshiyuki and Ichijō Takao.

across the generations of postwar writers. This chapter is an exploration of those themes as they appear in selected early fiction of Ōe.⁷⁸ My discussion of Self/Other and the physicality of the body will continue to build on the numerous images of the Look that we find in Ōe's work, as in Noma's (and in Mishima Yukio's, as I will discuss in the following chapter.) Further, discussion of the Self and the Other will be articulated in this work in an obviously Sartrean manner by the now overt references to and employment of the Look. In Ōe's work, as was true in Noma's (and Sartre's), existence and action is closely related to the materiality of the body and this forms the point of contact with existentialism. In Ōe's work, as is true in that of the other writers discussed here, the concern for physicality overlaps with the understanding of existentialism as a literature of the body. Discussion of the Self/Other and the Look is to read the fiction through constructs implicit in the contemporary interaction with existentialism and thus are constructs that provide richer readings of these fictional works.

In the previous chapter I have discussed at length the work of Noma Hiroshi and its confluence with existentialism. There is a similarity of sensibility running through the work of Noma and Ōe--and by extension many others--that is deserving of a more rigorous discussion. Many of the postwar writers share a similar conceptual framework evident in the literary creations of contemporary but quite dissimilar writers. After the Pacific war a concern with the body gets worked out through an

⁷⁸ The works I will discuss are: "Kimyō na shigoto" ("A Bizarre Job", 1957), "Shisha no ogori" ("Lavish are the Dead", 1957), *Memushiri kouchi* (*Nip the Buds, Shoot the Kids*, 1958), "Sebuntin" ("Seventeen", 1961), and its sequel "Seiji shōnen shisu" ("Death of a Political Youth", 1961).

existentialist understanding, and this concern for the body and issues of physicality pervades the fiction of the postwar decades.

Noma Hiroshi and Ōe Kenzaburō

The shared concerns and literary project of Ōe Kenzaburō and Noma Hiroshi are more than passing. The novelistic project of these two writers proves to be much more similar than has been previously documented. Ōe approaches the work of Noma with the awe of one who has gained much by building on the ground broken by a mentor: his respect for Noma is considerable. Noma, in turn, was also very intrigued by the younger Ōe and noted a similarity of project when he wrote,

One of [Ōe's] most basic themes concerns an individual continually struggling in the wartime situation in which he has been placed, [struggling] through to the postwar situation, and that individual's relationship to the contemporary situation of the imprisoning society in which he finds himself. . . . Ōe's starting point is certainly the situation of being imprisoned and of the people who are imprisoned. These people [i.e. characters] are placed such that they can be understood only through the physical body (*shintai*) of the imprisoned individual.⁷⁹ ("Hōhō no mondai" 154-155)

This is Noma Hiroshi praising Ōe Kenzaburō for undertaking the task that Noma himself has been working through for decades. Noma was intent on using the individual body as the prism to break down existence into its constituent parts and show what it is made of. Noma finds in Ōe the writer of the next generation who is

⁷⁹"Kankin sareta jokyō". This is an important phrase that Ōe himself introduced in the afterword to his initial collection of short fiction, *Shisha no ogori*, and will get a fuller discussion below.

continuing his own project. Here too the body is synecdochal, a microcosm that reflects the whole. I would also suggest that a commonality of atmosphere is shared by both writers, of *angst*-filled and lonely characters who are placed in situation, and this too is a sensibility that warrants Ōe's identification with the writers of the immediate postwar writers. Okuno Takeo also highlights the lineage extending from Noma to Ōe when he writes:

One gets a splendid . . . portrait of the postwar group from the descriptions of corpses intertwined in a holding tank awaiting dissection in [Ōe's] "Shisha no ogori". With this story one gets a symbolic sort of work that rivals Noma Hiroshi's *Kurai e* and that first generation of postwar writers. It was with this work of Ōe's that I was first able to grasp a sense of the inner world of this postwar generation. ("Ōe Kenzaburō" 226)

Okuno identifies the confluence that I have been noting among various writers, here applying it in particular to Ōe and Noma. That is, from a Symbolist influenced imagery of bodies and corpses jostled in an alcohol-filled holding tank Okuno finds a psychological portrait of the postwar generation. That they are, in a strict sense, of two separate generations but read together as they are here, would please Ōe enormously given his desire to be considered a part of that generation. The similarity of vision and expression in these two writers is pronounced.

Noma writes that Ōe not only describes "the man who finds himself placed in the imprisoned situation" but that he extends his discussion and concern to the very base, the root of humanity. Noma finds Ōe searching for the meaning of humanity, exploring the question of what it means to be human. Noma responds to Ōe's thoroughness, his intent to reveal all aspects of the individual and his surroundings. Noma employs a Marxist, but also an existentialist, vocabulary: "More than anything else, Ōe's themes cross the years from wartime to postwar, discussing the

relationships between one person and another, each placed in the situation of contemporary society, all with the sense of imprisonment” (“Hōhō no mondai” 154). Thus, individuals are “placed” in a “situation”, the confining and “imprisoned” situation that is a society of Others. Likewise, in another essay, he discusses Ōe’s consistent “pursuit of the *Existenz* of the student” working at the “Strange Job” (“Kimyō na shigoto”) of slaughtering dogs in the work by that title (“Ōe Kenzaburō” 122). Further, Ōe conforms to Noma’s own novelistic plan by focusing on this individual and then, in ever-widening concentric circles, describing wider and wider swathes of the landscape until he finally encompass all aspects of society. This essentially replicates Noma’s novelistic project of the *zentai shōsetsu*, an approach that replicates Sartre’s novelistic practice as well, culminating in the multi-volume *Les Chemins de la liberté*. It is a schema where the individual is a representative through which one can access the whole. For both Sartre and Noma this edifice is built on a Marxist foundation; it also overlaps with Sartre’s foundational emphasis on the physicality of the individual being. The confluence of these strands produces a powerful literary framework and is the thread that ties these writers together.

When Noma goes on to discuss individual works, he criticizes the 1958 work “Shiiku” (“Prize Stock”) as lacking in its descriptions of “the individual who is confined by the society that promotes war activity” (“Hōhō no mondai” 155), but finds that project is more complete and more successful in *Memushiri kouchi* (*Nip the Buds, Shoot the Kids*, 1958). When Noma quotes from Ōe’s novel to remind us that the main character and his brother are “a gazed-upon existence, like the situation of the wild animal who has not yet become accustomed to its caged existence,” he gets to the point I am making. Noma uses Ōe’s language here, which is simultaneously the language of existentialism, to discuss the story. More precisely, he uses the language of Sartre to remind us that the characters are in a situation where one is gazed at like an

animal at the zoo, treated like objects on display. A “gazed-upon” “existence” in an “imprisoned” “situation” makes use of Sartrean terms, and the vocabulary items by which Sartre’s ideas have been translated into Japanese. There is no lack of formal existentialist elements in either story nor in the commentary. There is no lack of existentialist feeling in either writer.

Noma goes on to make explicit the connection I have been suggesting: that the means of finding identity and individuality, that is, the method of confirming that the body is more than mere object, a being with consciousness, is rooted in the physical body. Again, the link between an existentialist sensibility and the body is clear. Noma writes,

In order to escape from within this cage [the characters in *Memushiri kouchi*] would have to change to the core of their internal organs. [They would have to move] away from this sensation of their selves being engulfed in foul smells, submerged in subterranean waters, and as being sticky and clammy; [it would be] a change extending from the hair on their heads to the mucous membranes of their anuses. (“Hōhō no mondai” 155)

Any change, any movement from the purely gazed-upon existence of the wild animals, of “thing” devoid of consciousness, would start from and end with physical organs. Again, this existentialist sensibility is radically linked to the physical, rooting both of these novelists in the postwar confluence with Sartrean Existentialism as a literature preoccupied with the body. “Sticky and clammy” also reiterates a visceral response that has come up repeatedly in this discussion.

This is to say that the reformatory inmates’ imprisonment is imaged on their bodies, especially in *Memushiri kouchi*. They are imprisoned by society and also by their own constricting bodies. This system of images is very familiar to readers of Noma Hiroshi. It comes as no surprise when Noma notes a familiar conclusion to this

set-up: at the moment when the promised liberation--a change to one's core--seems possible, one finds it is actually impossible and fraught with death.⁸⁰ The last image we are given in *Memushiri kouchi*, Noma reminds us, is of the deserter who has come to take up residence with these youths. This young man--who "has transformed himself down to his very viscera" recounts Noma ("Hōhō no mondai" 155)--is seen running across the landscape in a last desperate physical escape. But this is a sham, he has been caught and beaten by the villagers. He is running away to escape but they have slit open his stomach and those viscera he has changed are now held in his hands as he runs away. He has been "forced out [of the village] while showing his guts to all the youths" in Noma's phrasing ("Hōhō no mondai" 155). The Gaze has extended, literally, to his physical bodily core; this young man has been seen and rendered object. This is a common Noma theme and underscores the existentialism as body sensibility that links their work. Further, I am suggesting, this linkage is pervasive in postwar Japanese literature, not as some conscious explication of existentialism via literature necessarily, but as a theme so inscribed on the time that it is visible throughout various works and writers, intended or not.

Noma has explicated Ōe as I have explicated Noma: when escape from the imprisoned situation is within grasp it proves to be no escape at all. Where an escape to freedom entailed a change to the very core of one's being, physically as well as spiritually, one is condemned to literally take one's freedom into one's own hands. One may get out, but only while holding one's guts in one's hands. Sartre would

⁸⁰This provides yet another profitable point of entry for discussion into Ōe's work, as when Miura Masashi comments in his *Shutai no henyō* that, "The consistent topic of Oe Kenzaburo's work is death" (41). Miura develops this theme in the subsequent chapter of his work.

approve of course, freedom means only that the ultimate choices and decisions are one's own; they are not necessarily the choices one would wish for, not necessarily choices that allow for continued life. Escape that is no escape, escape that entails holding one's entrails is a theme that gets repeated in all these writers (and we will see it replicated in the life/work of Mishima Yukio).

Likewise when Ōe writes about Noma Hiroshi's generation, it is to include himself in that older group of writers. In so doing he underscores a similarity of project and sensibility. Thus Ōe can write that "At the least, until that point where my imagination becomes as all-encompassing and wide-ranging [*zentaika*--invoking a favorite word of Noma's] as Noma Hiroshi's when I survey the world . . . I am confident that I too will not find myself despairing" (*Dōjidai toshite no sengo* 27). In other words, Ōe continues in awe and hopes to replicate Noma Hiroshi's ability to bring the whole world into his imagery. As long as he has not accomplished this goal he has reason to go on, reason not to give in to the threatening despair. Ōe likewise then places himself among the "postwar" writers.⁸¹ This is the point of the title of this collection of essays, *Postwar as Contemporaneity* (*Dōjidai toshite no sengo*).

⁸¹ Although, as Ichijō Takao reads this collection, Ōe stresses his connection to other postwar writers precisely because he is anxious about his inclusion in this group. He wants desperately to be counted a member of that generation. In the midst of various controversies threatening to undermine the validity of the concept of a "postwar"--Ishikawa Shintaro's denial of "postwar literature"; claims by Nakamura Mitsuo and Etō Jun that it is merely "occupation literature", for example, as discussed in the introductory chapter--Ōe may be overcompensating. This then becomes evidence of "a complex of one who came too late" to be part of the group, a nod to another of Ōe's

There are other uncanny similarities as well: after Noma Hiroshi's initial success each of his subsequent works were awaited with great expectation. We find the situation is replicated in Ōe Kenzaburō. Tsuge Teruhiko writes of the initial excitement that his generation attached to Ōe's work, Ōe as the intellectual that represented the feelings of a generation of radical students. The faddishness that Existentialism enjoyed in Japan of the 1960s, as the world over, coincided with Ōe's rise to fame. It may be simply that Ōe gave voice to a fad of his own generation and secured his success. Tsuge for this reason considers Ōe (along with Kurahashi Yumiko) to be the representative writers of the "Sartrean generation", as he phrases it ("Jitsuzonshugi" 144). This is the generation well-read in Sartre's philosophy and fiction, in contrast to the generation I have offered of the late 1940s and labeled visceral in its understanding of Sartre. In this context "Ōe's pronouncements came to be received as from a spokesman for the young generation (Okubo, *Gendai bungaku kenkyū jiten* 240). Tsuge also wrote of the expectancy with which everyone waited for the appearance of *Warera no jidai* (1959) in the bookstores, again as a way to underscore Ōe's importance to that generation ("Jitsuzonshugi" 34). In a similar vein Shinohara Shigeru comments on the manner in which young people read Ōe's early fiction with great excitement and a sense of freshness. He then suggests that this also began the end of Ōe's popularity for when they moved on to relying on his essays rather than his fiction for articulations of his thought, the issues he took up, and the manner in which he spoke for them, they then stopped reading him altogether (7-8). This is the source for the ongoing discussions concerning Ōe's position in

obsessions, by referring to the title of the novel, *The Youth Who Came Too Late* (*Okurete kita seinen*) (20).

contemporary society, for he has seemed to lose many of his readers. But that is to project into the future.

Style and Existentialism

Initial reactions by the literary establishment to the fiction of Noma Hiroshi and of Ōe Kenzaburō are also parallel and worth commenting on for the light it sheds on the overlaps in the sensibility of their work. These too serve to underscore a similarity of project, a contemporaneity of spirit. Initial reactions to both writers were consistently strong, although not consistently positive, and often provoked marked physical reactions on the part of readers. Critical appraisals of Ōe's work in the context of postwar literature introduce the same points of discussion as did the initial discussions of Noma Hiroshi's work almost a decade earlier. Noma's work was consistently posited as the "first of the postwar writers" in the late 1940s. Critics such as Miyamoto Yuriko, as we have seen, responded to its visceral quality, claiming that it captured perfectly the mood of the time. Noma accomplished this by means of theme, but equally importantly by his style. Noma was often touted as the first to undertake and introduce postwar literature, as articulated by Honda Shugo, for one. So too, we find, is Ōe Kenzaburō:

We [Akiyama, *et al.*] have been discussing Ōe's "Shisha no ogori" as his premier work and taken it up as the work central to his early period. This is the first harvest of [the crop of] postwar literature. [We also get] the sense that this marks the appearance of a new sensibility and feeling [in postwar letters]. It seems to me that the prose itself has been thrust into the arena as an issue for discussion; some have gone as far as did one literary critic who pronounced that it is a "new form of bad writing." In addition, given the time period, one feels running through the background of this work the literary theme that had been

introduced to us by Sartre just then appearing as [the proponent of] a new literature giving expression to the situation of mankind's "imprisoned situation." (Akiyama 33-34)

Akiyama reiterates a standard commentary on Ōe as the new voice for the younger generation. Much of this attention focuses on his writing style, the manner in which it is "difficult" or "crude", or simply "bad". Recalling that this style had been described as "a new form of bad writing," Akiyama goes on that this arises from a "translation style" of writing. Style was a major topic of discussion in the work of Noma as well. This style which struck him and other readers as particularly awkward in the late 1950s, no longer strikes Akiyama with the same force when he picks up Ōe's work again three decades later. He and other readers have gotten used to this sort of style, he reports. Nonetheless, he finds something in this writing style that renders it distant, at one remove somehow. That is, much of the "newness" is taken as residing in the prose. In the same vein Muramatsu Takeshi can write that "even though it reads as a translation style of writing, it is alive" ("Yokomitsu Riichi to Ōe Kenzaburō" 286; see also Hirano Hidehisa, esp. page 36).

Discussion of style can mean various things: explicit restatement of subjects and liberal use of pronouns not necessitated by the conventions of Japanese, for example, is one sort of stylistic convention often employed by Ōe that gives a hard edged distance to the prose. The entire discussion of "translation-style" is fraught with ideological issues for it is couched in the perception long inculcated in Japan that the Japanese language is fluid and lyrical, and in a related sense, vague and nebulous. The facts refute this: even the celebrated prose of Shiga Naoya or Kawabata Yasunari, while ostensibly paragons of this fluid style, do not lose the reader in vagueness. New writing that is touted as greatly indebted to a foreign language did not begin with Noma, nor did it end with Ōe. It is a curiously persistent comment on new writers.

Thus, even while Akiyama claims that Ōe's style reads like a translation, stilted and awkward compared to the fluid style of a "traditional" master like Shiga Naoya or Kawabata Yasunari, a similar discussion occurs in the work of the contemporary novelist Murakami Haruki. The rumor is that Murakami writes in English first in order to render a lucid, rational (i.e. Western) sort of writing. The result of this practice becomes, curiously enough, precisely the opposite of that claimed for Oe: where complaints are leveled at Ōe's density, Murakami is found to reflect straightforward lucidity by his reliance on a foreign diction and grammar.⁸²

Tsuge goes on to note that when Ōe's work first appeared, concurrent with that time when students were caught up in the fad of reading Sartre, Camus, and Kafka, it had a decided "air of foreignness" about it that was quickly lost as the readership became accustomed to this style of writing and sensibility. Which is another way of saying that these critics who speak of literary style in these ways are not so naive as to be unaware of the ideological ramifications of what they are suggesting. Nor is Ōe, who would seem to be taking these up consciously, as part of his project. As Paul St. John Mackintosh describes it Ōe's "complex, impacted style, often redolent of Sartre's quasi-Heideggerean density" reveals "an ideological slant to his quarrel with the supposed 'vagueness' of Japanese. . . . His usual working method is first to write a straightforward Japanese sentence, then go over it two or three times, each time bending it out of its usual shape and making it more refractory, highly worked and polysemic" (10). Without interrogating the precise meaning of a phrase such as "Sartre's quasi-Heideggerean density," this synopsis does capture accurately the response of many reader's to Ōe's work, including the frustration by

⁸²Murakami addresses this issue in his interview with Jay McInemey.

many readers with what can only be characterized, on their parts, with Ōe's mean-spirited perversion of perfectly normal "straightforward Japanese sentence[s]."

Mary Layoun injects, I think, an important antidote to this sort of stylistic analysis:

What is presumably the "foreignness" of Ōe's fiction does not necessarily derive from other literatures or cultures at all. Ōe's texts are read as foreign as much because of their critical distance from the myth of traditional Japanese culture as from some perfidious non-Japanese influence. *Man'en gannen no futtōboru* (*Silent Cry*, 1967) derives as much from the deliberately aestheticizing distance of an Ōshima Nagisa film as it does from a novel by Samuel Beckett or a play by Arnold Wesker or Jean-Paul Sartre. (210)

I would add that Oe's work not only strikes readers as foreign because of the "critical distance from the myth of traditional Japanese culture," but because of his active attempts to subvert the traditional by rendering alternate histories, most notably in the novel Layoun refers to, *The Silent Cry*. Oe also achieves this critical distance by his subversions of stylistic "normalcy" as established by the traditional writers such as Shiga and Kawabata. He seems to invoke the author/narrator of Shiga *et al.*, a fictional strategy that overlaps with the stylistic one where a reading of the narrating first person is conflated with the author himself, a practice not exactly encouraged but never discouraged either, in the *watakushishōsetsu* tradition. Using this narrative structure connects his work to the *watakushishōsetsu* tradition,⁸³ as does the actual

⁸³ This is not to say that Ōe's fiction is *watakushishōsetsu*. Irony towards and mockery of the *watakushishōsetsu* tradition is a decided impulse in Ōe's work. It is an impulse that Mishima Yukio also found hard to resist.

overlap of fictional material to widely-known autobiographical material, such as trips to Hiroshima that coincide with the birth of a handicapped son.⁸⁴

While Ōe is often represented in his work by an autobiographical overlap with the narrator, he is not strictly speaking a confessional-style novelist. This willingness to be involved in the fiction has struck many as evidence of his involvement and commitment, his *engagement*, which also resonates with the existentialist vocabulary. Etō Jun for one finds in this style of writing the expression of commitment, an articulation of the ideological stake he is willing to take in his fiction. Following a long quote from *Memushiri kouchi* he writes that

In this passage there is instability and incompleteness but it causes us to see a new world that could not be contained, up to this point, in the contemporary Japanese novel. Considered as “novelistic style” it may be a little over-fine, a little too lyrical. However, this may be a secondary failing arising from the reversal that turns on the epoch-making stylistic axle. That is, Ōe is attempting to pivot on the axis away from the anti-stylistic [for Etō, synonymous with the anti-responsible] world of the past where one was taken by “things”, where one was objectified into a “thing”, where one tried to dilute the self in the midst of things. He was trying to pivot away from this world toward the world of a continued objectification in which one cannot be gotten hold of as a single object. (*Sakka wa kōdō suru* 83)

For Etō the power derived from the scene in the novel comes from Ōe’s being *in* the scene. Etō continues a long-standing, although here implicit, critique of the *watakushishōsetsu* for its solipsistic worldview. Thus writers such as Shiga could be

⁸⁴ Not to mention the obvious overlap of ungainly introverted adolescents in the fiction that correspond with the photographs taken of Ōe.

said to be objectifying their selves and making them object when placed as a character within a novelistic world entirely closed and distinct from the world of the reader. Ōe turns away from that tendency, pivoting on a stylistic axis, and emphasizes his relationship to the events being described. Etō finds that Ōe is involved in the fiction; he is engaged. He has a stake in the action and the reader is also drawn into that gamble (to invoke another lexical item often invoked in discussions of existentialism, especially in Japan). The works are not self-contained but bear direct reference to and have a relation with the outside world. Etō roots this in the prose of the text and finds that it marks Ōe's responsibility and involvement. Ōe may be identifiable in the world of his fiction, but that world is not the solipsistic world of the *watakushishōsetsu* that Etō derides. The writer of this fictional realm is engaged and commenting on some outside world.

Karatani Kōjin discovers a similar sort of move when he identifies a “phenomenological I” in the narrator of Ōe's fiction. He means by this that everything is filtered through the author/narrator; the author/narrator forms a convergence point through which all information in the novel must pass. Further, by being there in this way, the author/narrator is committed to the action. In this explication, when Minami (the narrator of “Shiiku”) asks “Why did they leave us?” there is also reference to the contemporary situation of Japan in 1958, claims Karatani (40–41). It is a committed text because it takes on its responsibility by articulating, however obliquely, issues contemporary to the production of the text. The fact that Ōe himself is so often seen being in the text by readers but in a manner at odds with usual *watakushishōsetsu* practice strengthens this sense of commitment not least because, as Etō intimates, the clear relationship this all bears to the issues of society that lie beyond the parameters of the novel. To all of these critics Ōe's committed engagement is a central component of the existentialist discourse.

Now, mention of postwar Japanese writers who write in an existentialist sort of style can bring to mind a number of writers. As Tsuge Teruhiko has cogently noted of the others that come to mind, the “existentialism” of these various writers can be traced by different genealogies. For example, he notes that Takeda Taijun is indebted more to the work of Dostoevsky than any other writer. Hotta Yoshie is influenced by Kierkegaard, while Abe Kōbō seems closest to Rilke or Kafka:

Nonetheless, in the extreme situation of wartime they were all placed in the situation of having to confront the essential meaning of Self and Other, of self and matter. . . . On the one hand, however, when one discusses the latter half of the 1950s and the 1960s there appeared writers who from their own study of Sartre’s Existentialism were launched into their particular variety of literary output. The writers representative of this group are Ōe Kenzaburō and Kurahashi Yumiko. (143-144)

My concern here is with writers working in a lineage that extends directly from Sartre. Again, Ōe was widely read in Sartre, and in outlook, both philosophically and politically, the influence of Sartre’s thinking is great. This is evidenced in the manner that he explored the meaning of the self in relation to the Other and to things, and explored them at a distance from existing conceptions of thought. This lineage is also established in the manner in which he continues the postwar discussions of the physical that are related directly to Sartre’s fiction.

Linking Ōe and Sartre is hardly new. The early influence of Sartre is often commented on. Shibata Shoji comments, as do many, that there is no way to deny that Sartre (and Camus) lurk in the background of Ōe’s fiction. Shibata is correct, for example, when he suggests that in “Shisha no ogori” the “dead” are placed as objects in a way that calls into question the materiality of all existence. Moreover, as he suggests, one could place the characters from this work in the middle of *Nausea* and

they would not be out of place (26). A biographical dictionary will note that Ōe's graduation thesis at the University of Tokyo was entitled "On the Images in Sartre's Fiction." It is also worth remembering that Ōe has written that while at the university he was "not much of a student" because he devoted the majority of his energies to reading the French works not assigned for class--Sartre's included to be sure--and writing fiction. "I myself had decided to major in literature in college after reading the works of Sartre, and my graduation dissertation, in the Department of French Literature, dealt with him. For much of my youth, I was 'under the shadow of Sartre'" ("Portrait of Jean-Paul Sartre" 36). In particular are cited his readings of *Huis Clos*, "Le Mur", and *Les Chemins de la liberté*. To quote one of the more biographical of critics, "He was, by these works, clearly sparked into activity and moved to expression. Further, there is no doubt that 'the sense of the situation of being imprisoned, the situation of living within closed walls' is a subject as well that comes directly--as well, of course, indirectly--from Sartre" (Morikawa 71).

Ōe and the Postwar Context

When Noma Hiroshi wrote his stories late in the 1940s he was working in a climate where carnality was being forefronted as an antidote to the perceived over-abstraction of the war years. This sense of carnality is best evidenced in the work of Tamura Taijirō and Sakaguchi Ango, Ango being the writer who ties the sense of the body to the concerns of existentialism, as I have noted above. This sensibility continues in Ōe Kenzaburō. Shibata Shoji finds that the gloom that pervades all this work comes from the shock of having lost the war, a fact from which no one has fully

recovered (11).⁸⁵ This is especially true for Ōe who keeps coming back to the war, one of the defining moments of his life (Nathan, “Introduction” xii-xiii). Ōe, like the students in his stories, was too young to serve as a soldier in the war. He was of elementary school age during the war and shares the experience of the war, although his are not the battlefield experiences of Noma and his contemporaries. Nonetheless, physicality and bodiliness in Ōe’s work is a commentary on the political situation outside his fiction, and it is similar in spirit to that of Tamura and Ango. If anything, Ōe ties his imagery more explicitly to the political than these mentors. Thus, where the immediate contrast for body (*nikutai*) is national body (*kokutai*) for Noma, in Ōe the physicality of bodies and the graphic sexual imagery is a comment on contemporary politics, an extension of the *kokutai*. For both generations of writers the physicality of the body, rendered in sexual imagery, overlaps and comments on contemporary political realities. Indeed, the physicality of Ōe’s fiction is just as much a part of and as firmly rooted in the postwar situation as any in Noma Hiroshi’s fiction. This physicality is likewise equally existentialist, part of an existentialism as body awareness that pervades the postwar years.

Hirano Ken also finds in the bodiliness of Ōe’s imagery a link to the political atmosphere of the war and postwar years. Thus, in Hirano’s words, “The two necessary descriptors in expressing human *Existenz* (*jitsuzon*) and ‘situation’ are sex and politics; [in Ōe] however, the appropriate (*shinjitsu*) manner of describing

⁸⁵Shirai Kōji makes an interesting comment in this regard, one that he doesn’t amplify, by reminding us that Honda has commented that were it not for the impetus of the war, existentialist style self-searching would not have happened as it did in Japan, would have been more internal, as in France (“Atogaki” 228).

mankind is by grasping them not as separate but as unified elements, not as negative but as positive” (“Ōe Kenzaburō” 494). We see that Hirano also makes liberal use of the language of existentialism when he describes the impetus behind Ōe’s imagery. Hirano’s discussion of Ōe’s fiction bears notice as well because he situates it within a broader sweep of literary history than most commentators. Unifying sex and politics is, to summarize his view, the appropriate and lauded way of going about literature, but it is fraught with difficulty. Hirano reads the literature of Japan, to this point in history, as having had to choose between emphasizing the sexual over the political. Thus, in his reading, late Meiji era Naturalist writers tried to handle sex from a new literary viewpoint but were unable to describe the political dimensions of humanity. They were able to describe the sex but not the politics. In contrast, the Proletarian writers of the early Showa period described the political with a new vigor but their method did not allow them to fully deal with the sexual. Hirano then goes on to explicitly link Ōe Kenzaburō with Noma Hiroshi as two writers undertaking the same project, as two writers who came closer to achieving this synthesis. Thus we find that “now in the postwar period it is with Noma Hiroshi that, for the first time, there has been a committed attempt to grasp sex and politics in a unified way and describe them in literature” (“Ōe Kenzaburō” 495). For Hirano, Noma’s experiment underscores the nearly impossible nature of unifying these two for Noma has been at the project for two decades (this article being written in 1967) and still hasn’t completed his project. Nonetheless, “Speaking from a literary historical point of view, Ōe stands in a direct line that extends from Noma Hiroshi” in his radical attempt to throw off the taboo of sex and the taboo of the political (“Ōe Kenzaburō” 510). Noma is the first to undertake the literary project that makes a serious attempt to link these “disparate discourses” (to recall Hosea Hirata) of sex and politics.

Now, in my reading, it is not the attempt at this sort of pairing that places them in a common lineage as much as the sensibility of the body (which can be read as sexual) as the starting point for a description of politics. Stated another way, the sexual (body) is an imagery of the political. There is a connection between these two elements that is rooted in the war and postwar experience that is expressed in a literary style tied directly to the reception of Sartre's fiction in Japan. The sexual body comes first; the almost oppressive sense of the body becomes the ground for action (the political). Action and existence are rooted in the body's physicality. This is the existentialist beginning for it is also Sartre's point of departure. The body that is nauseating in the fullness of existence and materiality is the Looked-at object. The consciousness that also defines the individual carries that body into action. Only then can there be a political dimension. This pairing of the body with the political (the State), and the conceptions of both originating in the War marks the work of these writers as part of the Japanese interaction with Sartre.

Hirano continues by noting that Ōe then follows in this lineage and continues the project. In Ōe's pairing of the sexual antics of his characters with the state, he links the sexual and the political. The university student in "Miru mae ni tobe" (1958) who alternately is kept by an older, corpulent prostitute serving a foreign clientele and must care for the rather sickly young Japanese woman whom is pregnant by him, is the forum by which "this writer has formulated a symbolic representation of 'occupied Japan'" (Hirano uses the katakana transliteration) ("Ōe Kenzaburō" 499). He goes on to recount the example that Ōe introduced in the essay "Warera no sei no jidai" of a young soldier who finds himself impotent because of his war experiences. Again, sex is explicitly linked to the political realm. Hirano finds here the "existential man who has once peered into the abyss of the sexual" ("Ōe Kenzaburō" 502). Or again, quoting from Ōe, "It was my goal, by means of the relationships with foreigners, to

describe the more or less defeated situation in which young Japanese find themselves” (“Ōe Kenzaburō” 506; see also Tsuge, “Jitsuzonshugi” 146).

All of which takes us back to the original point: the political situation of postwar Japan is written in an imagery of the body that proves to be existentialist. Ōe Kenzaburō shares a common space with the postwar writers and we find much in his imagery that ties him to a system of existentialism as body awareness that is specific to that situation, in particular is the explicit linkage of the physical and sexual with the political. This is the tie to a reading of Sartre that connects Ōe with the lineage of Noma’s generation. Noma’s existentialism was not as explicit as Ōe’s for Ōe also makes use of the wider range of images available to him, in particular, his articulation of the “imprisoned situation.”

The “imprisoned situation” is a term that Ōe introduced in the afterword of his first collection of short stories, “Shisha no ogori”, a collection containing many of the works I am discussing in this chapter. It accurately describes the claustrophobic feeling of these stories and would be appropriate even if Ōe hadn’t suggested it himself.⁸⁶ In Ōe’s words: “I wrote all of these works in the latter half of 1957. This

⁸⁶ Hirano Ken notes with great perspicacity that Ōe’s introduction of the term deserves interrogation. It would not be a surprise, he suggests, if this were less Ōe’s attempt to enlighten the reader concerning his own work than an attempt to direct the reader to a particular conclusion. Being introduced in the discourse of an “afterword” does not preclude his introducing it as a fictional element, part of the scenery of the works (“Ōe Kenzaburō” 493). This would be in keeping with Ōe’s practice of exploring similar issues in essays as well as in fiction. Sartre also viewed his fiction and his essays as two different discourses in which to attempt the articulation of the same ideas.

sense of the situation of being imprisoned, the situation of living within closed walls. was my consistent topic” (qtd. in Morikawa 68). “The sense of the situation of being imprisoned, the situation of living within closed walls” is a familiar existentialist image, prevalent in the early fiction of Ōe. In Ōe, even more than in Sartre or Camus perhaps, it is entirely physical. There is no lack of sentences underscoring this sense, sentences suggestive of French existentialist novels, phrases and images that suggest his reading of Sartre and Camus. We find individuals who are “like caged animals” (*Memushiri kouchi*) or literal animals caged (“Kimyō na shigoto”). We find individual corpses floating in an alcohol-filled cistern (“Shisha no ogori”). We have already noted how Ōe’s characters would feel at home in *Nausea*. It is a consistent image throughout many other of Ōe’s early works and runs parallel to a very important, and very existentialist, concept that is pervasive in this early fiction. Tsuge articulates this existentialist conception this way:

In concrete terms this phrase refers to dogs in a cage (“Kimyō na shigoto”) . . . an underground storage room (“Shiiku”), the inside of a bus (“Ningen no hitsuji”). . . and following 1958, it is expressed as the impossibility of escaping from Japan, or at least from where one is now to “a place other than where I am.” Thus, rather than as a wall, it is more exact to note that the “imprisoned situation” is a literal cage. In many cases the image is completed by a complementary sensation of the characters’ “being looked at”. . . . While a wall constricts one’s freedom in a physical sense, it is the Look (*manazashi*) of the Other (*tasha*) that wrests away the basic freedom of the one being looked at and turns them into an object. Inside of a cage, the individuals freedom is wrenched away at two levels. (217)

The characters in these fictional accounts are imprisoned in two respects, by the geophysical constraint of rivers, ravines, and forests, and also by the restraint of the

Look of the Other. Tsuge's description could be applied to any number of works by Sartre, to good effect. The situation these characters have been placed in is rendered all the more acute by the Look of an antagonistic Other. They are also imprisoned by the facticity--reformatory inmates, vulnerable youth, bumbling intellectuals--against which they must struggle.

The sense of imprisonment in Ōe's early stories is consistently relayed via the first person, yet the imprisoned and enclosed character is not the main character, as Shibata Shoji notes. Those most physically enclosed are bodies floating in preserving alcohol or dogs in a concrete enclosure awaiting massacre. Thus, he further notes that it is not usually individuals but groups that are enclosed together. In most cases it is youths enclosed in some sort of cut-off isolated mountain village, without recourse to the outside world or even to the world of adults. But to my mind Shibata is being overly literal in his reading of this imprisoned situation. Ōe's characters are indeed consistently restrained by physical barriers but the Look of the Other and each character's facticity is equally restraining, here in Ōe as in Sartre. They are hemmed in by much more than physical barriers, and these may be the harder to surmount. They are constrained by the Look of the Other. Ōe's invoking the word situation ties him directly to the wider sense that Sartre intended: every individual is in a limiting situation, facticity, a physical concrete set of factors that prevent one from doing exactly as they would wish, in complete freedom. Freedom comes from the ability to choose from the options available, even if, as for the soldier, the only choices are those between death from outside as a soldier, or death by one's own hand, a self-chosen escape from the present situation. The situation is limiting and imprisoning, what matters is what the individual does in that situation. The choices proffered are bleak and sterile, nonetheless they are choices and the individuals must choose. We are reminded again of the terrible burden of freedom.

II. The Fiction

Over and over again in the early stories we are given images of bodies constrained in one way or another. The constraint is usually physical and the physicality is forefronted and explicit. In *Memushiri kouchi*, for example, the youths of the reformatory are imprisoned by the gaze of the villagers, put into a virtual cage to be watched over (observed) by the villagers like wild beasts at the zoo. As in many works (“Shiiku”, *Memushiri kouchi*, *Man’en gannen no futtōboru*) the village where the action takes place, where the characters have been placed, is cut-off and remote, surrounded by a deep ravine. The geographical feature common to so much of Ōe’s fiction is a village cut-off by flood and ravines, separated from the outside by a bridge as often as not inutile (“Shiiku”, *Memushiri kouchi*). Further, this being “left-behind” reflects the passive aspect of the phrase “imprisoned situation.” It also overlaps with the common phrase “placed in situation,” all which are immediately recognizable as descriptions drawn from the existentialist palette.⁸⁷ In the context of this study, the discourse of existentialism is rooted in the images of a physical body that Japanese readers found in Sartre’s early fiction. Implicit in this fiction are issues of Self and Other and the Look. Articulating those implicit concepts and applying them as a critical tool in reading the fiction under consideration here yield a richer reading.

⁸⁷ Again I call on Hirano Ken for important historical perspective. He reminds us that Oe is not the first writer taken with the image of the imprisoned situation. He reminds us of Ishikawa Takuboku’s consistent critique of the Meiji movement to modernize and with it the frustration and nihilism of that generation reflected in his best known essay “The Blockade of the Age” (“Jidai heisoku no genkyō”) (“Ōe Kenzaburō” 471).

“Kimyō na shigoto”

“Kimyō na shigoto” was first published in the *Tokyo University Newspaper* (*Tōkyō daigaku shinbun*) in 1957. Hirano Ken first read it there and subsequently wrote about it in his important literary review column. It can then properly be called his debut for the attention a critic as prominent as Hirano accorded it aroused significant interest in his work, and from there he was picked up by the leading literary magazines.

One of the most unnerving scenes of this story is one of the earliest. The student protagonist walks into the area where one hundred and fifty dogs are housed, “a plaza-like space surrounded by a low concrete wall” (253). He is to begin his new part-time job as the helper in “disposing” of dogs no longer needed for scientific experiments. This is the prototypical “imprisoned situation” of Ōe’s work where individual people/animals, never alone but always in groups, are encircled by some insurmountable barrier, forced to contend with each other at the level of the Look. While the Look is an unsubstantial barrier, it must be treated as concrete as the material concrete enclosure where they are housed. The physical enclosures work as a concrete imagery to remind us of the power and reality of the constraining Look that is equally insurmountable.

The imprisoned dogs quietly await their fate. The student walks into their midst and they turn and stare back. This is the battleground of existence, a showdown of the Look. This is Hell, the place where gazes are exchanged in a struggle for individuality. This is the sort of Sartrean battlefield replicated in practically all of Ōe’s early works. Ōe routinely replicates Sartre’s image of individuals battling for freedom, but Ōe is less concerned if that exchange is between man and man or man and animal. In fact, Ōe routinely takes up Sartre’s image of two individuals battling for freedom with their eyes and pushes it one extra step: Ōe cares little if that

exchange be between man and man or man and animal. The distinction between human and animal is anything but clear, and we are reminded how tenuous is the distinction, that consciousness is found only in certain physical entities. In fact, in *Ōe* the exchange is as often as not between man and animal. Humanity is not a stable quality. It is another reminder of the insubstantial distinction between human individuality/consciousness and the realm of objects. Consciousness is all that separates my individual materiality from the materiality of objects; it is also the only factor that separates my being and that of the animal world. In this case the Gaze for determinacy takes place between man and animal:

The dogs did not howl when I entered the compound, instead, they all turned together to look in my direction. It is very creepy to have the eyes of one hundred and fifty dogs bear into one. I realized that in three hundred cloudy tallow-colored dog-eyes was reflected three hundred little images of me. The thought sent a shiver through me. (253)

The word I have rendered “creepy” here is the *kimyō* of the title, “A Creepy Job.” At first reading the “creepiness” would seem to reside in the nature of the job itself. Disposing of so many dogs in a slaughterhouse atmosphere is not a pleasant image. There is certainly a bizarre creepy aspect to the one entrusted with killing the animals and his attempt at applying an artistry to what he does. In that case one must question the level of normalcy that might be attributed to one who undertakes such a job, even as a part-time, once-and-done enterprise. Creepiness also lies in the silent, staring one hundred and fifty tallow-eyed dogs. I am suggesting that underlying all of this is a much more basic, philosophical even, “creepiness” akin to the nausea of Sartre’s *Roquentin*. The protagonist is confronted with a radical unease stemming from this encounter with the materiality of the Other very similar to *Roquentin*’s experience. It seems safe to say that *Ōe* was consciously employing these

philosophical underpinnings to Sartre's fictional worlds. These considerations all proceed from the insistent centrality of the physical body in these works.

Thus, when there is a discussion in "Kimyō na shigoto" concerning the cremation of the dogs' bodies, at the moment when one of the student helpers realizes the dogs are to be cremated at the nearby facility, the same incinerator used for human cremations, he is troubled that no discrimination is being made between animal and human. Another student quickly questions, "What's the problem? I mean, bodies of dogs, bodies of people, how are they different?" (257). Dead bodies are all inert matter, are all material object in the same way, seems the obvious point. She would seem to be assuming a basic philosophical premise: that all bodies are nothing but matter until the exercise of consciousness, until the one who possesses those bodies exercises their freedoms and causes them to "be."

These dogs are known to set up a howl for no apparent reason, a howling that can go on for two or more hours. It begins without apparent cause and ends just as irrationally. There is no rational motivation, like so much else it is absurd, bizarre, inexplicable. Conversely, however, at precisely the moment when one expects a great howl, there is none: when the youth who is to lead them to their deaths walks among them they are entirely disinterested. It is all very bizarre, very creepy. It is so precisely for the same reason that Sartre's Roquentin feels Nausea: the materiality of existence pushes in on him and the Look of Others constrains him. The story emphasizes a basic philosophical tenet.

"Shisha no ogori"

The bodiliness of this sort of imprisonment is rendered even more forcefully in the first paragraph of "Shisha no ogori" ("Lavish are the Dead"). While "Kimyō na shigoto" is properly speaking his debut, "Shisha no ogori" is often discussed as the

earliest of Ōe's work to represent his initial vision. It also appeared in 1957, published in *Bungakukai*. It seems to reflect even more forcefully a philosophical imagery comparable to Sartre's fiction. First the title, and then the first scene, underscore the materiality of the human body and the absurdity of existence. It is not entirely clear at the beginning what is being described, heightening the sense of dislocation:

The dead bodies were submerged in a brown liquid, the arms of one intertwined with the arms of another, heads were pushed down only to rise again. The bodies were half in the liquid and half out, they were enveloped in a light-brown and pliant skin. Each was clearly individual, stand-offish in attitude. "They" turned inward as if soul-searching, contracted, yet resolutely attached to their bodies. (262)

This is certainly an unexpected manner to talk about corpses, as unexpected as the idea itself of corpses being preserved in alcohol for future dissection. It is as unexpected as the part-time job the main character has arrived to perform, that of moving these corpses from their current holding tanks to newly constructed ones.⁸⁸ That is, all these unexpected facets combine to create an entirely absurd situation. Equally unexpected is our discovery (although not, evidently, entirely unexpected to the protagonist) that these corpses possess volition, personality, and the ability to communicate. "They" continue to have a sense of who they are. "They" continue to

⁸⁸Such jobs seem to have in fact existed. As Yamada Yūsaku tells it, this story overlapped chronologically with the Korean War at which time the best paying part-time job involved "taking-care of the dead from the Korean war." But the smell got into one's hair and under one's fingernails and was virtually impossible to expunge (35).

“be”, resisting the separation of consciousness from material being that would define death in this schema. They are introspective and they can communicate, they clearly retain their human qualities. They are physical bodies.

This unexpected jarring continues the implicit query of the story: why does it seem only a little unnatural--if not outright wrong--to speak of these bodies as “people”? Why does it remain “creepy” (to remind us of the connection to “*Kimyō na shigoto*”) to encounter bodies in this way? The story consistently turns back to this basic query: “What is, after all, the difference between the body of a person with a distinct personality and a corpse, an object only? Why do we want to think of one as an object and not the other?” The protagonist looks at the bodies floating in the tank and wrestles with this question: “That’s it, we are all just object (*mono*). A perfect object, quite precisely constructed” but object nonetheless (267). If there is a difference it is slight indeed.

The entire situation is absurd: moving bodies from one holding tank to another (rendered all the more absurd by story’s end when we find that a bureaucratic fumbling renders the move literally meaningless. There is in fact not going to be any move.) While on the job he looks on these corpses that still seem to possess consciousness and the attributes of human individuality and finds that his own body is capricious and at the whim of its physical needs. This underscores the tenuous distinction between the physicality of a corpse (a body no more) and the physicality of his own living body whose physicality asserts its primacy. His body asserts its will without logic or reason by insisting on its very physical needs. He realizes that he is hungry. The sensation of hunger descends on him to remind him of the physicality of his own body, its animal limits. “I realized that I was really famished. However, when I decided to wait until later for my lunch I also sensed my appetite quickly

disappear” (270). One is not sure which controls what, whether the physical limits the conscious or whether the conscious is truly in control.

The fact that they are dead is the first imprisonment. They are physically imprisoned in the holding tank, floating in alcohol, as they await dissection. “They are enveloped in pliable, light-brown skin” (262), imprisoned by the physical barrier, a skin “strong as steel” in Noma Hiroshi’s phrasing. And then the student enters into conversation with one of the bodies, a former soldier and asks him about this imprisonment: “I imagine you want to escape from all this, this truly imprisoning situation (*kankin jōtai*) (270). The fact that this is a soldier reinforces the connection to the Pacific War, a connection so important to Ōe. The soldier reminds the student of the physical sacrifice the war incurred, telling him how “we carried in our physical bodies (*karadaju*) the hope [for peace] of all you younger generations” (271). The horrors of war, its physical demands and needs reflect the political. Or, as Akiyama Shun recalls of his first reading of “Shisha no ogori”, “There was also something fresh and new about the Gaze applied to the corpses in this work, how the bodies and the death of humans was all treated as a ‘thing’. It struck me as the viewpoint towards humanity that has come out of the war experience” (36-37). This response also reiterates the connection between the physicality of this story with existentialism and the experience of the war.

This current imprisonment in a holding tank is more than merely political, it is physical as well. As a corpse, one knows that these bodies are matter, they are thing only. The only difference between these bodies and the body of the youth who observes them is their lack of consciousness. While this is perhaps the most basic definition of death, the meaning of “consciousness” is the point of contention. These bodies cannot “be”, there is no consciousness to separate them from their material

state. These bodies are individual, but they resist intimacy. They are body as object, the Existential starting point. They are radically cut-off one from another.

The university student who stands before the bodies floating in the cistern then begins an internal monologue:

All of these dead bodies, they are different from the bodies that are immediately cremated at death. The bodies floating in this cistern have something I can relate to and the sense of independence of a perfect and complete "object". It seemed to me that the bodies cremated immediately after death are not as perfectly "object" as are these. These [floating corpses] must move gradually to that unspecified middle ground between object and consciousness. Those others are taken off directly and cremated. They have no time to become completely "object". I looked intently at all the "objects" floating in the cistern, all which had completely finished the perilous journey to object-ness. They all had this sense of completeness and a sense of firmness. I thought these were stable and firm "objects" just like the cistern itself, and the floor and the skylight. A small movement like a shimmer ran through my body.

And we too are all "things". (267)

The story goes on for a while like this, taken up with the very Sartrean concern for the body in an attempt to find the distinction between the materiality of a body that is living and one that is not. The bodies seem to possess a material objectivity no different from that of floor or skylight (or inkwell or ashtray, to borrow from Sartre.) Accompanying the sensation that the body is a discreet "object", a "thing", is the shudder of fear and unease, of nausea. If the body is essentially object the only thing that prevents it from a continued dumb existence as rock or tree is the exercise of individual freedom upon that body. The thing must "be". The shudder of fear is the shudder of responsibility, the stickiness also experienced by Roquentin, the stickiness

so palpable to Fukami Shunsuke and the other students in Noma's *Kurai e*; it is the nausea one experiences in the face of the existence that exudes from being. One shudders before the fullness of existence and is reminded of the radical freedom to which the individual is condemned in order to be individual.

The underlying philosophic inquiry of this work is explicitly stated here: what is the nature of existence and our bodies (Hirano, "Kaiko Takeshi" 469)? This, of course, is also the fundamental query of existentialism. This explicit connection to the body reminds us again of the linkage to postwar Japan, a connection reinforced by the introduction of the soldier. This concern about materiality and identity is rooted in the individual body and individual physicality. Further, this concern is explicitly tied to the Pacific War when we learn that the oldest of the bodies in the cistern have been there since the war, that the corpse who communicates with the protagonist was a soldier. This scene deserves a more detailed appraisal.

The man overseeing the operation of this room and its inhabitants identifies the body of the soldier to the university student who has arrived for the job. The supervisor points out the corpse of a soldier from the last war and explains: "I heard that at the end of the war he tried to desert but was shot by one of the guards. He should've had a medical autopsy, but with the war's end that was postponed. You know, I remember well the time when they brought his body here" (270).

And then it is lunch time. The student stays behind to finish up his current task: searching through the brownish liquid to recover the identifying placard attached to a limb of the soldier's body. The student thinks to himself,

"I imagine that now especially you would like to escape from this truly imprisoned situation."

To which the soldier seems to answer, "Not really . . ." and continues, "During the war you must've been just a kid."

“I was in the process of fully maturing. I came of age when the sole hope of every unhappy day was for the end of the war. . .”

The soldier replies “This hope of yours is something that I bore completely within my body” (270).

Herein the tie to the war is explicit; it is the immediate backdrop. The history of the postwar is represented in this alcohol-filled holding tank. The war experience is couched in an imagery of the physical body. The conversation is prompted by the body, now rendered object, of a soldier who was killed trying to escape the imprisonment and absurdity of that war. In trying to escape he was deprived of the consciousness that is freedom. We can say he grasped his freedom by attempting to escape, an absurd plan, but an individual one. Equally physical was the experience of the student, for the “unhappy everyday” calls to mind days of rationing and deprivation and roots his experience in the war as well (Shibata 18).

The other character of this story is a female student. She is pregnant and working at this unsavory task to get together enough money for an abortion. Thus are introduced familiar Oe themes: life and death swirls around issues of birth and the responsibility that goes with it. The parallel seems obvious, how different are the lumps of flesh floating in alcohol from the lumps of flesh floating inside of her body? When the woman is nauseous in the middle of the story, we sense a nod to Sartre’s fictional introduction to these issues, a sense that Akiyama Shun records:

At the time when I read “Shisha no ogori” I felt very strongly that it shared the same aura as Western literature. I thought to myself “This is really something, written by a young Japanese writer in Japanese.” There was also something fresh and new about the gaze applied to the corpses in this work, how the bodies and the death of humans was all treated as a “thing”. It struck me as the

viewpoint towards humanity that has come out of the war experience. (Akiyama 36-37)

This is a work that is postwar, but at one remove from Noma's time. It is more articulate with the philosophic issues raised by Western writers, and especially the French writers we have discussed here. It is the reflection of the sensibility that Akiyama has identified and the quality that sets Ōe's work apart, as the product of a new generation.

Memushiri kouchi

The imprisoned situation is also well-represented in another early work that has already been discussed, *Memushiri kouchi*,⁸⁹ first published in 1958 in *Gunzō*. As a single example of that ever-present imagery is the following sentence from early in the work: "In order to be as safe as possible before their staring Other eyes, we aliens, we captured wild animals, had to take on an existence like rock or flower or tree without volition, without even eyes to see. We had to simply become an observed existence" (6). This work is shot through with this sort of Sartrean existentialist imagery. Few other of his works are quite as explicit in taking up the Sartre's imagery and vocabulary, few are quite as articulate in describing the Gaze and its effects. The characters' sense of being observed wild animals becomes one more image among many that reflect the physicality of the images, as Noma Hiroshi noted above when discussing this work. (In that case, the fact that Noma singled out this work for discussion is in itself suggestive.) Central to the structure of this image, and by

⁸⁹This work has recently been translated by Paul St. John Mackintosh and Maki Sugiyama as *Nip the Buds, Shoot the Kids*. For purposes of clarity I have chosen to use my own translations in this essay.

extension the characterization of the boys of this story, is the fear engendered by the eyes, the Look of the Other, and the individual's response to that Look. This is another example of a world that conforms to the Sartrean environment. It is classic Sartre: a battle of wills for which the prize is the determination of existence and in which the weapons are the eyes and the Gaze. It is the Sartrean struggle to cast or parry the Gaze that determines or steals one's freedom; and this is the basic mode of existence.⁹⁰

This work resembles in many ways--in plot, setting, and conflict--another well-known work he published in the same year, "Shiiku".⁹¹ The action of *Memushiri kouchi* focuses on the activity of two brothers, one older and incarcerated, the younger brought to join the penal colony by the Father who "worn out by searching for a place to evacuate my brother to, had finally hit upon the idea of taking advantage of the reformatory's mass evacuation" (27). With the later central appearance by a deserter from this same war, the war is made a central element in the story as well. The penal colony is really a small rural isolated village where they have been evacuated from the urban bombings. (The war is again marked as an immediate referent.) It is cut off from the surroundings. It is also cut off from escape by a deep ravine that circles the mountain like a moat. Their job in this location, another bizarre one although by now familiar, is to dispose of dead bodies. The bodies of animals

⁹⁰This passage also reflects Camus: the word I have rendered "alien" is *ihōjin*, which is the Japanese title of Camus' *L'étranger*.

⁹¹This work has been translated twice: by John Bester (and slightly abridged) as "The Catch" in *The Catch and Other War Stories* (New York: Kodansha, 1981); and by John Nathan as "Prize Stock" in *Teach us to Outgrow our Madness* (New York: Grove Press, 1977).

have accumulated because of a plague that threatens the town (in another setting reminiscent of Camus). Further, Ōe takes every opportunity to call to mind animal imagery, especially if scatological. Dead animals were excrescent in this village. Here again, living humans stand face-to-face with dead beings, almost drowned in the effluvia of existence and the detritus of life. Here too the distinction between the protagonists and the animals especially, as well as the villagers and the animals, is called into question. The difference, if there is one, will be located in the body. What is it really that separates the reformatory youth from the animals they collect, and by extension, from those who watch over them, who look down on them? The meaning of existence is the consistent concern of this work. The villagers for one regard their youthful charges as being closer to the animals than to themselves: "The blacksmith's behaviour toward us wasn't quite appropriate for real people" (51). This separation and ambiguity is constantly returned to. The young boys are constantly reminded how they are seen, they are constantly kept in their place by this manner in which they are regarded. This leaves the characters acutely aware of themselves, first, as physical object, as body. They are struggling to slough off the stiffness and the burden of their materiality. This recalls Sartre's description of such a scene where the fixating Gaze emanates from a physical body; it focuses on another physical body. "By the mere appearance of the Other, I am put in the position of passing judgment on myself *as an object*, for it is as an object that I appear to the Other" (*Being and Nothingness* 222, emphasis mine).

The boys are subsequently left behind in this town. The physical terrain makes it is a very effective prison that would refrain them in even without the stares of the villagers. The villagers have abandoned them from fear of the plague's death. They retreat to the other side of the ravine, to a place where they can keep an eye on the boys without having to get too close. The villagers barricade the only retreat from

the village by piling brush on the bridge leading across the ravine. In this situation the youths find themselves closer to the “existence” of corpses than to the living humans in whose village they live, for they have been left behind with the corpses, clearly regarded as little different by the villagers. After burying one of their comrades who has now succumbed to the plague, we find them gripped by a fear like “the primitive Japanese, so terrified of the resurrection of their dead” stamping hard the earth over the primitive grave: “[The corpses] scared us, like birds flying up at one’s feet, but they were closer than the grown-ups toting their hunting rifles on the other side of the valley behind the barricade, the cowardly grown-ups from the Outside who thwarted us” (102). Fearful that the dead might re-materialize from under their feet, they nonetheless feel closer to that object than to the living beings who oversee them. The tenuous distinction between being and matter is articulated, as is the physical separation of the self from the Other also replicated in *Seventeen*, another of Ōe’s early stories.

Seventeen

Seventeen was first published in *Bungakukai* in 1961 and soon followed by a sequel, *Seiji shōnen shisu* (*A Political Youth Dies*). Given the scandal that surrounds these works, to say that they were explosive is an understatement. The pairing of sex and political activity, here in a decidedly unflattering way, lay at the root of this scandal. Japan’s vocal right-wing was incensed with this pairing of a maladjusted masturbating seventeen year old driven to right-wing political activism whose erotic object is the emperor. The scandal was heightened by the appearance, in the same year, of Mishima Yukio’s “Yūkoku” (“Patriotism”). Mishima’s work is also an eroticized fantasy where the Emperor is a fetishized object; however, in Mishima’s fantasy this pairing of sex and the Emperor is Romantic and sublime, rapturous. Ōe

also captures the rapture of orgasm but it is decidedly unflattering, the orgasm always masturbatory. This portrayal of an introverted maladjusted adolescent who is propelled by his internalized anger and social ineptitude to become a right-wing political activist understandably outraged the right-wing.

Seventeen is based on an actual event, the stabbing of the chairman of the Socialist Party, Asanuma Mainejirō, in 1960. The terrorist who plunged a knife into Asanuma was also a seventeen-year-old, this one named Yamaguchi Otoyō. Following the publication of this fictionalized portrayal Oe received death-threats and harassment by the vociferous right-wing minority of Japan.⁹²

Etō Jun found in this work the confluence of sex and politics that has been a focus of this essay when he wrote, at the time of its publication:

With this work the issue that the writer is developing is, in short, the relation between sex and politics. In this case, becoming a martyr for the cause of Imperial Sovereign-loyal subject relations (*taigimeibun*) becomes the ultimate

⁹²Mishima's story is also based on an historical event, the attempted coup of February 26, 1936. Masao Miyoshi sketches the history of Ōe's story in his "Introduction" to the English translation. As he notes, 1961 was also the year when Fukuzawa Shichirō published "Furyū mutan", a surreal sort of dream-tale that proved inflammatory not least by its description of the decapitation of the imperial couple, also outraging the right-wing factions. Another seventeen year-old terrorist was moved after the publication of Fukuzawa's story to stab the wife and maid of the publisher of the piece (vii). For a comparative analysis of these three works-- "Furyū mutan", "Yūkoku", and *Sebuntin*--see Nishikawa 313-345. See the article by John Whittier Treat for a discussion of "Furyū mutan" in English.

erotic climax. The reverse is also true, reaching the supreme erotic pleasure is the result of devotion towards the Imperial sovereign. (*Zen bungei* 1: 100)⁹³

The title of this story refers to the adolescent's seventeenth birthday, the initial setting of the story. It also refers to an ideal of adolescence by establishing a resonance with the youth magazine of the same name. At the opening of the work we find him sitting in the bath, covered with soap. His loneliness is made explicit from the second sentence: "Nobody in my family realizes it's my birthday. Not my father, not my mother or my brother. Or at least they act like they don't" (1).⁹⁴ His sister returns from her job as a nurse with the Self-Defense Forces (SDF), a favorite cause of the right wing, a favorite rallying point for the Left. Her job forms a crux for his identity as he waffles from supporting the Left to working for the Right because of the inflammatory cause it is for both political extremes. She calls to him as he sits in the bath: "Seventeen years old. . . . Doesn't it make you want to grab yourself?" (1) which he promptly does. His chronic introversion, his inability to draw any pleasure from others is the root of this anger. That anger prompts his political involvement. It is also the source for the profound inability to act in many cases.

Early on he argues with his sister about the SDF. She defends the SDF and the royal couple; when he finds he has nothing substantive to back up his leftist sorts of arguments against her he realizes:

I'm stuck. I go to the most progressive high school in Tokyo. We even have demonstrations. When one of my class friends starts badmouthing the SDF I come to their defense, thinking about my sister working as a nurse in an SDF hospital, but still I think I want to be in the Left. (10)

⁹³Etō continues in this article to discuss Mishima's "Yūkoku".

⁹⁴Unless noted otherwise all translations of this story are by Luk Van Haute.

His sense of futility and blundering, his inability to do anything will haunt him throughout the story, as will his profound sense of ugliness and incoordination. This scene also establishes his future responses to such frustration in political argument: from impotence will come violence. He thrashes out at his sister, kicking her above the eyebrow, shattering her eyeglasses, drawing blood, upsetting the dinner table.

He crawls into the outdoor shed he has made into a bedroom and talks to a wild cat he calls “gangster” that shares this room with him. Gangster is “the perfect villain: a barbarian, the incarnation of evil, ungrateful and shameless, explosive, a lone wolf” (22). He takes comfort in himself, he masturbates. The next morning he finds:

I’m not feeling very good when I wake up. My head aches, my arms are heavy, my legs are heavy, my whole body feels slightly feverish. I feel like every other in the world has come to inform my newly awakened body of the fact that I’m an impotent good-for-nothing. (28)

This translation captures exactly the explicitness of a key Sartrean term, *tasha*, and retains the sense in which it was intended: “I feel like *every Other in the world*” is looking at me. All the eyes are on him; he feels their Gaze; he is made impotent, both sexually and physically. He is frozen in materiality and cannot go on, painfully aware of the Other’s Gaze, petrified by what the Other sees him as. He has been seen and cast as a good-for-nothing by the Look. He is petrified and cannot act to change that image.

I’m the man who can’t change the real world even the slightest bit. I’m the man who can’t. I am an impotent Seventeen. To tell you the one thing I can do, well, I can run away from the eyes of other people, hide, and jerk off. The ones who, like architects, are recreating and fixing up the totality (*zentai*) of the world are the Others. While I am closed up in this outdoor shed I call a ship’s cabin

doing you-know-what, the Others are out there monkeying around with the world. (31; translation modified)

The day after his birthday is his university entrance exam; it is the most important date in his school career. The entire day is, to grossly understate a comical sequence of events, a complete disaster. He is twenty minutes late for the first battery of exams. On the train ride home from a day of humiliation he meets one of his classmates and is invited to be a *sakura*, a paid plant in the crowd of an extreme right-wing politician making speeches in downtown Tokyo. He goes and this experience changes his life. This movement towards the political, the ideological, towards action, is here conflated with sexual activity, as has been the entire story and so much of the work under discussion here. (This will continue with the discussion of Mishima's work.)

I suddenly feel like I'm an accomplice in some sexual adventure. Later I will often recall this occasion. An event of utmost importance for the future direction of my life is crystallizing before my very eyes. At least, that's the profound feeling I have, here in Shinbashi Station on this late Spring afternoon. An old railway employee is sweeping the platform with an old-fashioned bamboo broom. With his rational outsider's (*daisansha*) eyes, that must be how he sees us: a couple of high school students, pale-faced and pimply, on our way to some sexual prank. (48)

As he listens to the rantings of the leader of the "Imperial Way Party", of whom he actually thinks very little, his attention turns in another direction. He forgets his surroundings, his friends, the speaker, the curious bystanders, all fades away. Only one thing remains:

My hostility and hate I turn solely on the real world, solely on the Others.

Always I've been blaming myself, always attacking my weaknesses and

covering them with mud and self-loathing, always thinking that there was no one more deserving of hate. (52)

The motivation for political activity becomes the existential one, it is a way to overturn the hegemony of the Other's Look. Being a rightist youth, however, gives him the uniform he needs to thwart the Gaze of the Other and overturn the Other's Look:

The uniform of the Imperial Way is modeled on the Nazi SS uniform. It gives me strength when I walk the streets, and an intense, memorable joy. . . . The tender, weak, vulnerable, unshapely creature inside is invisible to others. When people looked at me before, I'd blush in fright. I was bound hand and foot by self-consciousness. But now, instead of seeing what's inside me, others see the uniform of the Right. More than that, it instills them with fear. I am no longer ashamed, no longer hurt by the eyes of others. And gradually this sensation grows, to the point where, even when I don't wear the uniform, even when I'm naked, the eyes of others have lost the power to hurt me with shame. (66)

Thus, "tonight I've learned . . . [that] I, the rightist young man, have completely conquered the eyes of others" (69). This of course is the hope of the story but it proves much more difficult to uphold with any conviction.

Seiji shōnen shisu

Seventeen was followed by a sequel in 1961 entitled *Seiji shōnen shisu* ("A Political Youth Dies"). *Seventeen* ends with a portend of a violent future, for as that narrative ends we read how "Time after time I'm arrested, but as soon as I'm released, I take up my attacks on the demonstrating mob. Again I'm arrested, again I'm released" (72). Rain is falling at the close of the story; at the opening of *Seiji shōnen shisu* that rain has stopped, it is a glorious day, and the Seventeen and his comrades are readying themselves for another violent confrontation, this time to take place in

front of the Diet building. The invulnerable feeling that his uniform gives him does not last however for again we are told of the chronic loneliness that plagues him, "I'm so lonely I can't stand it I feel enclosed behind the castle wall of Others" (8-9). His attempts to surmount that barrier and steal back the decisive power of the Other consistently erupts as physical violence. He acts precisely to leave the Other with the sensation of his power, to leave the Other quaking at the sight of his Party *accoutrements*.

On the same sort of mission he goes with members of the Imperial Way Party to Hiroshima to stage a counter-demonstration against the leftists who are demonstrating there. The imagery is again explicit: Hiroshima is hot and oppressive, he feels closed in and nauseous (15). His group is ambushed by the much larger demonstration and it ends a bloody *mêlée*. He finds himself on the ground covered with blood and hair that is not his own, but "It is blood of the Other, hair of the Other" (16) he realizes in disgust. He cannot get away from the physical presence of the Other. He himself is wounded, but the presence of the Other, close enough to cover him in blood is sufficient motivation to push him to his feet and continue fighting.

As one would expect in an Ōe story of this period, the presence of the war soon asserts itself. The protagonist befriends an older member of the Imperial Way Party who served as a soldier in the war. That experience radically separates their outlook on all issues. This elder member breaks away to form his own political organization, one that he intends to be purer and more focused. The protagonist comes to realize after a time that this group remains a party of one, and is likely to remain so, for the only ones sufficiently pure to be considered for membership in his organization are dead. Only his comrades who had fallen in the battle are of sufficient commitment for his organization. The war cannot be forgotten, it never fades. The

protagonist realizes in this that he is not of the war generation, will never partake of that glory, as he words it:

The A-bomb, the agony of war, the desire for peace, Humanism, none of that stuff has any relation to me. During the time of the Second World War I was just a kid. I have no connection to that glory, that sadness, not even to the great chorus that formed a finale to the A-bomb, none of it; it has absolutely nothing to do with me. (18)

This sentiment is replicated near the end as he is being interrogated by the police, they as well who lived through the war, and have no understanding of his experience, his lack of that particular experience.

He has a revelation when he sees the image of the emperor float before his eyes and he realizes a new sense of purpose for his life. This comes through after extended passages of self-doubt in despair, waffling even at this point in his commitments, concerned that he is not what he seems to be. He is motivated by that most fundamental of anxieties, fear the what the Other sees is not the real person. This anxiety moves him to don the right-wing uniform, to engage in terrorist activities to insure that there be no mistake. With the revelation he seems assured: "I now know my mission in life, I will stake my life [giving it all I have] and slaughter those bastards that so poison this country Japan!" (26). Staking one's life is another existentialist term (*inochi wo kakete*). This concern about inner and outer is continued in this sort of existentialist rhetoric: "All that anyone out there knows are the lies of the external world, it is nothing more than rehashing the activities of the Other. But me, at this point, have concern for and connection with only those things that are within me, only that holy revelation growing within me" (31). But in this he knows lies his death, nonetheless he is committed, he has made his decision, staking his fate on the revelation of the emperor who will lead him on. In this come the sort of

wartime rhetoric to abandon all selfishness, to give all to the emperor: “In this is loyalty (to my lord), a selfless loyalty. Having cast off selfishness, having rid yourself of your physical needs (*nikutai*), then you’ll be happy” (26) are the words running through his mind. Here is the dichotomy now familiar to us, the casting off of the physical and carnal, the individual and particular, all for the purpose of the emperor, the symbol of the holy nation State invoked during the war years.

While the image of the emperor is a fruitful point of departure for a discussion of Ōe together with Mishima this is not the place for an extended discussion of that mutual interest. What is of interest here are the existentialist themes running through both, and that is what we will find in our discussion of Mishima Yukio, below.

Chapter 5: Mishima Yukio, The Body Seen

"I am seen therefore I am. . . .

He who sees me causes me to be; I am as he sees me."

The Reprieve

At the origin of the problem of existence of others, there is the fundamental presupposition: others are *the Other*, that is the self which is *not* myself."

Being and Nothingness

I. Introduction

I have chosen to devote the final chapter of this study to Mishima Yukio. There are a number of reasons for this. For one, it is precisely because Mishima Yukio does not come to mind at the mention of existentialism in postwar Japan that I want to discuss him here. I feel warranted in looking at his work because he evidences the sensibility and themes that I have identified as existentialist in the postwar Japanese context. Mishima is well-known and widely read the world over. That his work is obsessed with the physical is immediately obvious to most readers. Likewise, his characters' obsession with appearances and the Look of the Other is directly related to their understanding of their own physical space and ties directly to the issues I am discussing here. This is not the all of Mishima's work, of course, but it comprises a large and significant proportion.

In the context of Japan's postwar, Mishima manages to be both a representative postwar writer and also an anomaly. His work evidences the concerns I have associated with existentialism placing him squarely in the postwar discourse, yet Mishima would not have thought of himself as existentialist. I believe he would have resisted the role I am according him in this discussion. I take this to suggest that the existentialist concerns for the body and for the Self and Other (the Look) were pervasive enough to be prominent in the writings even of those who had no professed interest in this corpus of writing. In that context Mishima will be the exception that proves the rule; the writer who is not an existentialist yet shows by the frequency that existentialist ideas appear in this work the importance and pervasiveness of that discourse to a generation. This becomes then one of my tests, a check to see how wide was the existentialist sensibility I am describing.

I will then undertake an existentialist reading of Mishima's fiction. I will read his fiction through the concerns I have elucidated and discussed above. It was in considering these issues that the work of Mishima kept coming to mind. It was clear that Mishima evidences many of the proclivities I have ascribed to Noma and Ōe, it was intriguing and begged further consideration because Mishima did not seem the obvious writer to discuss at this point of this study. Even though Mishima professes little interest and, in fact, little patience for, Existentialist ways of thinking, his work suggests the opposite. A reading of Mishima's work through the paradigm offered here as existentialist is warranted, however, and will provide important clues to understanding Mishima's work as well as this postwar age. We will find that his work is very much a part of the postwar discourse on existentialism in Japan, where Sartre was taken to be a writer of the body.

There is a much more conscious and deliberate interaction with Sartre's ideas in the writings of Noma and Ōe. Even though Noma did not have access to Sartre's

work when he wrote his earliest fiction, we have seen how he wrote against Sartre as those writings became available, and how he wrote with a sense of Sartre's importance in Europe due to reports and hints in foreign journals. His full-fledged interaction with Sartre came much later in life and focused on novelistic method. Ōe wrote his fiction having absorbed much of Sartre through the originals (presumably) and translations. Mishima, however, showed little interest in Sartre's essays or philosophy. Nonetheless, when we read his fiction through the concerns I have bracketed off in this discussion of existentialism—concerns for the body, concern for the Look and the role of the Other—he appears as existentialist as Noma or Ōe. My project is not to prove that Mishima was an existentialist, only to show that his works conform to and are enriched by a reading that draws from this discourse. The point is to suggest the pervasiveness and importance of existentialist ideas to the postwar generations and, that being the case, to suggest how those readings might enrich our understanding of Mishima's work. Thus, when I say I wish to discuss Mishima as an existentialist writer it means I will apply the existential framework to his work to note how pervasive and important these ideas were in his fiction. To reiterate, that existential framework is organized around two issues, the discourse of the body and the construct of Self and Other, and these themes are basic to Mishima's fiction. Discussing them in relation to his work enriches our understanding of Mishima's novelistic enterprise while also providing important clues about the temper of the postwar era.

The body is central to Mishima's *oeuvre*. This is immediately obvious to most readers: "Most of the answers [to the questions posed in Mishima's work] pertain to the flesh" (Wolfe 37). There is also a consistent and pronounced anxiety towards the Look and the Other (Sato 84-85). We also find that in Mishima's work—as in Noma's and Ōe's—existence and action are rooted in the physical body. In this regard Mishima

makes a curious admission in his famous 1969 debate with Tokyo university students when he said, “My early work related to society only by means of the erotic; in that way it seems I am quite similar to Ōe Kenzaburō” (*Zenkyōtō* 25) This is also interesting for the admission he makes to the commonality of purpose he shares with Ōe.

Likewise, in Mishima as in these other novelists, existence is dependent on the Look. Without the Look the individual could not experience their own existence, would lack the proof that they exist, they would lack that certainty. The materiality of the body is the starting point--and often oppressive reality--for all discussions and understandings here in Mishima, as in Noma and Ōe, and as originally in Sartre. In Mishima this becomes a characteristic conflict between actions and speech. The body that exemplifies action and substance is contrasted to words which haunt the Mishima character by their insubstantiality. The body is entirely substance, existence is material, overflowing and overpowering, the source of Roquentin’s nausea. The anxiety in Mishima is located here, but thrown into relief by the contrast to words and their seeming unsubstantiality. The body is solid, speech is not. Actions can be measured and verified by the Other, words are suspect. This forms a famous dialectic in Mishima where the concrete action of the body is contrasted to the abstractions of cerebral thought. This dialectic central throughout Mishima’s work of body/physicality/action placed in opposition to the cerebral/spiritual/abstract takes us back to the initial postwar discourses initiated by Tamura Taijirō and tied to existentialism by Sakaguchi Ango (as discussed in chapter 1).⁹⁵ In this way

⁹⁵Mishima makes a curious comment on Sakaguchi Ango in a *taidan* with Itō Sei and Honda Shūgo that appeared in the January 1965 edition of *Gunzō*. Honda suggests that from the standpoint of fiction writers who have experimented with more

Mishima's work can be read as existentialist because of these paradigmatic structures--identity based on the Look, continual conflict with the Other--and also because it participates in the Japanese ("native") experience of existentialism as a literature of the body. We will find that Mishima writes fiction that proves to be as existentialist as that of his contemporaries.

Mishima Yukio was born in 1925. He is exactly ten years younger than Noma Hiroshi and exactly ten years older than Ōe Kenzaburō. While all three were variously greeted by the literary establishment as the heralds of a new age and the spokesmen for a new generation, Mishima is a writer of no school, part of no obvious confluence of literary streams. Mishima has always been something of an anomaly, not entirely outside the literary lineages and associations but neither an active member of any party or coterie, as is so often the case in Japan, and as the literary history of postwar Japan is so often plotted. (e.g. Noma of the first wave of postwar writers while Ōe is of the third, etc.)⁹⁶ Even Ōe, who is himself a quite singular imaginative genius, is closely

journalistic types of writing, the most representative of the postwar writers may be Sakaguchi Ango. Mishima responds: "You know, as far as artists go, it is Sakaguchi Ango that I most respect [of postwar writers]". Honda's response evidences some surprise. Mishima says he is taken with Ango's "decadence", the emphasis on the body as I have discussed in the first chapter, and the issue I am reiterating here (Mishima, "[Taidan] Sengo no Nihon bungaku" 381).

⁹⁶It is true, of course, that Kawabata Yasunari served as an early mentor, that there was a brief relationship with the *Japan Roman-ha*, and that there was even an association with the left wing *Kindai bungaku* group. Nonetheless, we cannot say that Mishima ever really belonged to any such group. For more discussion, see Donald Keene, 1167-1186.

linked with writers such as Abe Kobo and Kurahashi Yumiko who appeared at about the same time and were all taken with similar issues. So, even while the literary dictionary on my shelf claims that Mishima “attracted attention as a standard-bearer” for his generation--invoking the same phrase it used to describe Noma and Ōe as well (Kindai sakka kenkyū jiten kankokukai 371), as Honda Shūgo succinctly concludes. Mishima shares in the postwar *milieu* and ferment yet remains distinct from it: “[Mishima Yukio] is of the postwar group without being quite ‘postwar’” (“Mishima Yukio no seppuku jisatsu” 419).

Mishima was of draftable age during the war (i.e. his war experience is in many ways even more immediate than that of Ōe Kenzaburō’s who was in middle school) but he never served on the battlefield, in contrast to Noma and many of his own peers. This is just one of the ways in which Mishima is singular among the postwar writers. He is not associated with any of the postwar literary groups yet he is a writer of the postwar generation. He is discussed as an important spokesman for that generation even though his experiences were at significant odds with that generation. Okuno Takeo seems to stretch this point (or highlight the tendency) to emphasize Mishima’s importance in relation to his age and generation when he champions Mishima as “the long-awaited savior of Shōwa (*Shōwa no moshigo*).” He goes on to say that, however “I still think that his essential nature was different from the age of Shōwa” (“Mishima Yukio” 188). Perhaps this only underscores the contradictions that Mishima conjures up for many commentators. For Okuno, the “savior of the age” who will rescue the generation from its literary stagnation is fundamentally out of place in that very age. This parallels Honda’s sense of Mishima being representative while significantly at odds with the age.

While in the previous chapter we found just how deep went the overlap of the fictional concerns of Noma and Ōe, we find that Ōe and Mishima also share a

significant overlap, one that has been explored in depth by Susan Napier. There is between these two writers a significant rivalry, one that continues even now in Ōe's work, almost thirty years after Mishima's death (Nathan, address). These seems to me the possible reason that the *taidan* that Ōe and Mishima shared in 1964 gets off to such a rocky start: the mediator begins the discussion by reminding them of the results of a questionnaire sponsored by *Gunzō*, the literary journal publishing this discussion. In answer to the question "Of contemporary Japanese authors, who is that you would like to read more than any other" Ōe received the most answers in the previous year (1963) while Mishima received the most in the current year (1964) (Mishima and Ōe 349). This reminder did little to stimulate discussion and the conversation is testy and frigid. They have been vying with one another from early on. We have seen as well the overlap in publication history in 1961 of Ōe's *Seventeen* and Mishima's "Yūkoku". Thus Susan Napier is correct when she writes that

[Mishima and Ōe] make an interesting comparative study on several other levels. Professionally, Ōe and Mishima share a number of important attributes. They are two of the most important and controversial writers of postwar Japan, writing fiction that was sophisticated enough for the critics but, at the same time, entertaining enough to gain a wide readership. Indeed, their works are notable for their action-filled plots on controversial subjects such a sexual and criminal aberrations.

Yet despite these similarities on the professional level, politically the two writers occupy virtually opposite ends of the spectrum. Mishima's glorification of the emperor system and of the military earned him such appellations as "right-wing" and "fascist," and the excoriation of many left-wing critics. Ōe, on the other hand, is almost anarchistic in his conscious hostility toward established

authority and is a committed and articulate spokesman for a variety of causes from ecology to human rights. (3)

As is suggested in this, a commonality of artistic vision seems to motivate both of them. Nonetheless, as Napier also documents, these apparently opposing political tendencies belie common obsessions and concerns, such as the authority for action and the standard to which society is to be held, and the place of art within that society. The same basic questions motivate both of these writers, although in differing directions.

Mishima was not an existentialist in any formal sense. He makes his antipathy clear when responding to a question by the Tokyo university students in 1969. When one of the student asked Mishima “What is the Other (*tasha*)”? Mishima responds not so much to the question itself as to the pronounced Sartrean perspective that runs through the question’s long preamble by answering (as I have noted previously): “As Sartre--who I can’t stand--has it in *Being and Nothingness* . . . [where] he has analyzed the relationship between Self and Other. . .” (*Tōron* 20-21). Mishima also discusses Sartre and his work in a *zadankai* with Honda Shūgo and Nakamura Mitsuo. In this roundtable discussion concerning recently translated drama of Sartre, the discussion never veers from critiques of his literary work, i.e. from issues of characterization and plot development. It is an informed and intelligent discussion of the artistic structure of Sartre’s fiction and drama, with significant praise and also some rather strong critique of the work, but nothing about philosophical issues.

Even though Mishima cannot be called an existentialist in any philosophical sense, the prevalence of concerns for physicality and the Self and Other in the writings of postwar writers--even such singular writers as Mishima Yukio--goes beyond any explicitly conscious philosophic applications. The discourse on existentialism in postwar fiction insists on being heard with such tenacity as to suggest that it

comprised the fabric of more than one postwar decade. In that sense, as Tsuge Teruhiko recasts it, the discourse on existentialism was so strong that it was not even superseded by Structuralism, the competing philosophical strain of the late 60s and 70s (“Jitsuzonshugi” 126-127). Existentialism comprised an important context for discussion right up to the 1970s. This is another of the reasons that I want to look at the work of Mishima in this study: the nexus of concerns that I have associated with existentialism in postwar Japan appears in fiction where it is not expected and strongly suggests just how pervasive and compelling those issues were. The discourse on physicality and the Other whirl around the central core of existentialism like electrons orbiting an atom’s nucleus, basic but rarely seen. It suggests that they were such an integral part of the intellectual atmosphere that they appear, almost unconsciously, in the work of writers of such differing proclivities as Noma Hiroshi and Oe Kenzaburo, who each represent a different generation, and Mishima Yukio, chronologically straddling the two.

My argument is strengthened by the fact that these themes are not simply suggested in Mishima’s fiction but they are pervasive and insistent. Issues of identity tied to and dependent on physicality (i.e. in the manner that Sartre was received in Japan) are myriad in Mishima. To insist that physicality is a central concern in the work of Mishima just as we found it to be in the existentialist Noma and Oe is of course true, but it is also a gross understatement. Eroticized physicality is predominant and pervasive in Mishima’s fiction. The Sartrean construct of Self/Other worked out in the *Look* is everywhere evidenced in this *oeuvre*. Mishima, the writer who would not have considered himself an existentialist, lived in an existentialist age and wrote existentialist fiction.

Miyoshi Masao invokes a similar reading when he writes, although from a differing vantage point, that

this [abstract] quality of [Mishima's] characters seems to spring from the same source as the narrative problem: the obscure outlining of the self in the Japanese novel. Although the writer is often preoccupied with questions about "the I and the Other" (with a capital O), this is not the same as "The I and many diverse others." That is, the culture's control of individual awareness reinforces belief in a collective, metaphysical entity, the Other. (*Accomplices of Silence* xii)

Mishima's relationship to the *watakushishōsetsu*, a discussion that underlies Miyoshi's discussion here and one that has asserted itself in the discussions of other writers, will get a fuller treatment below. However, Miyoshi finds the presence of the "Other" to be an overarching force in all Japanese writers because of the constricting nature of Japanese society. It squeezes all life out of the Japanese in its totalizing force and thus becomes the Other, becomes the difficulty of characterization in these novels, snuffs out the impetus of a highly individual expression of character. The *watakushishōsetsu* is for Miyoshi here, the "essential pattern of Japanese prose fiction" because Japanese society squelched the individual to such a degree that the only possibility is solipsistic experience (*Accomplices of Silence* xii). This all-encompassing Other is exactly the force against which Mishima writes. The Mishima character acts with an acute sense of that Other and acts and reacts accordingly.

Mishima himself has expanded this idea of the Other in a discussion with Abe Kobo. He makes a distinction here between one's "neighbor" (*rinjin*) and the "Other" (*tasha*). In this he addresses the distinction that Miyoshi raises. This Other is quite different from gossipy constricting neighbors and society. The Other is more absolute, it is the Other of Existentialism. "So while concern for one's neighbors is Humanism, the idea of the Other is Existentialism." Mishima goes on to surmise that since "in Europe there was only this neighborly concern, there was a great [impulse]

to discover the Other. . . . but this is very different from the usual neighborly concern for those next door. It is via the frightening eyes of the Other that one's own *Existenz* is developed. I find it a very interesting way of thinking, all in all" (418).

Abe responds by noting that it is often said that since there is no absolute Other (*zettaiisha*) such as the totalizing God of the Western Christian tradition real literature is not possible in Japan. While that is true, he continues, we do have neighbors and we are conscious of what other's think about us, but that is not the same as the Other. Mishima disagrees, by stating that there are no neighbors in Japan, by which he means the sort of neighborliness that Europeans experience. Japan has the force of society (*seken*) and the neighborhood watch groups (*goningumi*) of the Tokugawa era but these are not the neighbors of a humanistic tradition. They are Other because they are not organized out of concern for each other but to preserve order and to report infractions to the authorities. In that sense, he states, "Japan may have been the first to discover the Other" (418-420).⁹⁷ Mishima then articulates the necessity of the Other, so necessary that the writer must create one in order to have a foil against which to define the self. He states that the writing of fiction is essentially the creation of an Other which is needed for self-definition, for if such an Other is not in place one must be created (421).

In the *taidan* with Abe Kōbō, Mishima is unusually candid concerning this point of the development of Self and Other in his fiction. When Abe suggests that "In your case only the Other gets on stage and that is why you can't write *watakushishōsetsu*," Mishima responds: "That's probably right. And so, precisely because the self is the Other, unless one constructs another copy of that Other, one's

⁹⁷Mishima expresses similar ideas in an interesting *taidan* with Akiyama Shun; see especially pages 443-445.

own *Existenz* (*jitsuzon*) cannot be verified. Thus [writing fiction] becomes the occupation of creating the Other” (420-421).

Two different Others are being articulated here. When Miyoshi looks at fiction, he focuses on the societal conditions of fictional creation and finds that society is the Other that stifles fiction. Mishima writes against this Other it is true, but the Other that appears in his fiction appears as distinct individuals, characters who are friends, neighbors, family. It seems to me that Sartre stresses the latter where individual identity is formed on the battlefield of the Look. Ultimately, it is Sartre’s understanding being discussed in this essay. Again, de Beauvoir’s conceptualization and popularization of Sartre’s Other conforms to that which Miyoshi discusses. The Other that is society plays a large role in the actions of the Mishima’s fiction but it is the representation of the Other as neighbors and other characters that is readily identifiable. It is this Other that motivates this discussion for again, in Sartre’s paradigm, the Other is that threatening consciousness that threatens to fix one in a role and steal individual freedom.

In Miyoshi’s discussion, society is the “accomplice of silence” because it eventually silences all writers by its conspiratorial constrictions; society supports an ideology as the conceptual glue of culture that Alice Jardine attributes to Althusser (see note 45, above). For Miyoshi, Japanese is the language of silence because it pushes its writers to silence: “Kawabata learned this language of silence to perfection--at the expense of his personality [and eventually silencing himself by suicide]; Dazai embarrassed the language with his clowning, until it finally embarrassed him to death; Mishima, who understood the problem better than anyone, had to turn to his body as his ‘second language’” (*Accomplices of Silence* 179). In this Miyoshi brings the discussion back to the starting point of this essay, the inextricable link between a self characterized in opposition to an Other and the physical body. This self is so

necessary that the artist's task becomes to create it in fiction, as we have seen Mishima articulate. The body is the starting point and the Other demands it be fleshed out. The connection between the existence of the Self is dependent on the Other, so much so that Mishima admits that one need be created if not immediately available. In Mishima that creation is articulated by a language that is articulated through the body.

When Miyoshi speaks of the "second language of the body" he is taking an important phrase from Mishima that is important in this discussion as well. He looks to *Sun and Steel*, a work important to this discussion for the commentary it affords these issues: "As I pondered the nature of that 'I', I was driven to the conclusion that the 'I' in question corresponded precisely with the physical space I occupied. What I was seeking, in short, was a language of the body" (*Sun and Steel* 7). Mishima's language of the body is the creation of the body, the body made flesh, made substantial by facing the Other. Such is a summation of Sartre's basic premise and also a summation of Mishima's literary project.

I want to argue that this existentialist paradigm can be successfully applied to Mishima's earliest fiction and this makes him look as existentialist as Ōe Kenzaburō or Noma Hiroshi. There is throughout this fiction consciousness of the Other and its relationship to the physical being, the body. Further, in addition to the issues of immediate concern here, of physicality and the Other, Mishima's characterizations are of alienated individuals in extreme and absurd situations keenly suffering feelings of *angst*, disillusion, and despair. Mishima's characters also display an acute awareness of the "facticity" that limits individual identity and action. The relationships among Mishima's characters, because constructed in this way, almost invariably conform to the Sartrean characters' struggles in response to the Gaze. They are developed in accordance with the Self-Other construct. The anxiety towards the Other's Gaze prompts his characters to attempt to deflect or redirect the Gaze. Mishima's characters

are thus obsessed with masks and costumes, with roles and actions, all in conformance to this paradigm, all because of the insistent anxiety of the Other's Gaze falling on their own bodies.

Confronted by the Other, Mishima's characters become conscious of how they look (appear) and then they act and react accordingly. Masks and roles, costumes and *accoutrements* are central for these characters. The masks are placed on a body and it is the body that performs the roles. Sartre's conception of the Look and the Other is a construct that enriches our reading of Mishima most poignantly. As an answer to the old philosophical problem of one's own existence, Sartre posits that we know we exist when we sense another sees us, when we feel shame, for "the Other is the indispensable mediator between myself and me. I am ashamed of myself as *I appear* to the Other. . . . Shame is by nature *recognition*. I recognize that I *am* as the Other sees me" (*Being and Nothingness* 222). Further, I not only know that I exist because I feel the Other's Gaze fall on me, I am determined by that Look because I change my actions according to the image I perceive that Other has of me:

These few remarks will become more concrete if we recall an experience familiar to everybody: if we happen to appear "in public" to act in a play or to give a lecture, we never lose sight of the fact that we are looked at, and we execute the ensemble of acts which we have come to perform *in the presence of* the look; better yet we attempt to constitute a being and an ensemble of objects *for* this look. (*Being and Nothingness* 281)

The stage is also a central image in Mishima's work for the characters are constantly aware of the Look and are consistently cast as performers in a role. A closer reading of the fiction will underscore the centrality of this conception of the individual and the Other.

II. The Fiction

Kamen no kokuhaku

As if written with Sartre's image in mind, the stage is a central image in *Kamen no kokuhaku* (*Confessions of a Mask*), where the protagonist is acutely aware of the role in which people see him. *Kamen no kokuhaku*, published in 1949 (translated 1958 by Meredith Weatherby) is the novel that brought Mishima fame and recognition; it set the tone for Mishima's *oeuvre*. Honda Shūgo noted that the fiction Mishima published before *Kamen no kokuhaku*, save for a few understanding readers, went completely unnoticed. Hanada Teruhiko praised this novel as the place where "Twentieth-century literature begins" (qtd. in *Kindai sakka kenkyū jiten* 372). The novels that followed were largely read according to expectations established by *Kamen no kokuhaku*, that is, expectations that *watakushi*, the first-person narrator of the novel, is identical to the novel's author. This novel is often, and popularly, read as only slightly adorned autobiography about a precocious and sensitive young man's sexual awakening and the struggle to accept his homosexuality, or perhaps more precisely, his efforts to convince the Other and himself that he is not homosexual.

This work proclaims to be the "confession" of a mask thereby raising all sorts of questions concerning identity and seeing before the reader ever opens the book. The fact that it is a confession by a mask takes us to the Sartrean concerns I have been exploring by prompting the reader to ask, Why a mask? Whose gaze is being averted, or misdirected by these masks? (We remember that the Japanese allows this to be the single confession of many masks, as well as the multiple confessions of a single mask. It also allows the more usual reading that it is the extended confession of a single mask.) Who or what is being hidden from whom? Who will win this battle of determinacy? It presents itself as a work about being seen, about the masks and visages presented to the Other doing the seeing, about theatrics. Mishima added to the

possibility of meanings with some cryptic notes in an afterword to the first edition of this novel. Thus, we read,

Even while calling it a confession I have allowed falsehoods (*uso*) to graze freely throughout this work. They ate of the grass wherever they wanted. With that the falsehoods were satisfied and did not disturb the fields of “truth” (*shinjitsu*).

In the same way it is only the mask that has eaten into the flesh, that is stuck right onto the flesh, that can make a confession. The basic essence of a confession is the “impossibility of confession.” (“*Kamen no kokuhaku nōto*” 258).

This also plays into Mishima’s taking up (or pulling down) the *watakushishōsetsu* tradition. This is not the place to introduce an involved discussion of the *watakushishōsetsu*, not least because it is much too broad a subject for the purposes of this study; however, because of Mishima’s comments on this tradition and the way that this novel interacts with it, it asserts its importance to this discussion. The conflation of a “fictional” tale and a “real” confession plays into the genre expectations of the *watakushishōsetsu*. “Generally, when one refers to *watakushishōsetsu*,” in the succinct generalization of Takahashi Hideo, “the main character of the novel is taken to be the writer himself and the bond of equality between them is never doubted. With this presupposition all of the activities and affairs described are believed to be the writer’s direct experience or limited to the world of his perception” (275).⁹⁸

⁹⁸For a further discussion, in addition to Takahashi Hideo, see the studies by Edward Fowler and Irmela Hijjiya-Kirschnerreit.

Mishima himself has suggested that he, like all writers in Japan, must confront this tradition. It cannot be ignored. He asserts that the *watakushishōsetsu* exerts such a grip on Japanese literature that all writers must engage it to overcome it. It becomes a defining Other in the writer's task. The demand is that they must show that they can (or can't) write a novel in this tradition. *Kamen no kokuhaku* is the Mishima novel that interacts with this system. It is the work with which he takes on the confessional I-novel tradition and, as he describes it, exerts his independence (Mishima and Akiyama 443). The *watakushishōsetsu* genre demands a critical interaction with fictionality and truth, with sincerity and fabrication, as does *Kamen no kokuhaku*. On this issue, however, Miyoshi Masao is moved to remark that "The 'objectivity' of [Mishima's] fiction is itself but one more mask, and rather a transparent one at that" (*Accomplices of Silence* 145); this, however, is precisely the mask demanded of the *watakushishōsetsu* tradition.

Mishima makes this point even more explicitly in a *taidan* with Honda Shūgo and Itō Sei where he claims, rather gruffly and sounded somewhat disgusted with the whole affair, that the *watakushishōsetsu* is a literary son (*musuko no bungaku*) that must overcome the father, meaning all fiction must break with tradition before it can come into its own as a mature existence (387). This is also an apt description of *Kamen no kokuhaku*, the novel which, starting with the title, takes on the tradition of sincerity, truth, and confession while marking a break with the tradition. If anything, *Kamen no kokuhaku* mocks the tradition by calling these qualities into question.

Kamen no kokuhaku is at the very least a novel with autobiographical sections. The resonances in Mishima's life are not very difficult to find. The autobiographical quality of *Kamen no kokuhaku*, fiction though of course it is, has kept many scholars and students busy trying to find ties and make connections between novelistic "fiction" and autobiographical "fact." Mishima has done little to satisfy the question, actually

confusing the issue at the time of *Kamen no kokuhaku*'s publication. Hence the interest in the following advertisement prepared by Iwanami Press for release of the book. Mishima wrote the advertisement himself:

Aside from the sections written about the life of the artist, this story is entirely a fabrication, entirely without the possibility of existence. I intended to create an entirely fabricated confession. . . . It is only the mask that has eaten into the flesh, that is stuck right onto the flesh, that can make a confession. The basic essence of a confession is the "impossibility of confession." ("*Kamen no kokuhaku nōto*" 258).

Hirano Yukihiro notes that this novel, which is by definition fiction and fabrication, is being marketed by Iwanami as a novel (marked as fiction). That is straightforward enough. However, he asks, in that case, why is it necessary for the author to make such a disavowal of the autobiographical nature of the work? What can he mean by a "fabricated confession"? It is necessary precisely because it will be read as autobiography (204-207). It does not stretch the facts to say it was intended to be read as autobiographical.⁹⁹ It is of course also true that such a disavowal only serves to strengthen the original assumption that it is autobiographical in nature.

⁹⁹Most Japanese critics and readers do, in fact, read it purely as autobiography. This was particularly true at the time of its publication. As eminent a critic as Honda Shūgo takes this as an entirely autobiographical confession. He dislikes it because it is "unbelievable." It was Mishima, however, who insisted that it had "no possibility of existence." It is Shūgo's stubborn insistence on taking the novel at face value (and finding it unbelievable) rather than allowing parts to be "true" and parts pure novelistic fiction, that is baffling. Its literary value becomes rather a test of its truth value. He dislikes this novel because he cannot believe that such a life is possible (2: 117-123).

Mishima may be accused of fanning the flames of human curiosity (and thereby fanning the sales of the book, as a good advertisement should), by conflating the issues.

As readers we have largely been pulled in by this tradition to the game of trying to determine which Mishima is the "real" Mishima, of trying to determine if the Mishima we read in the novels, assuming that there is autobiographical overlap, is the "true" Mishima that is known from "real" life in a number of roles--latter-day samurai, movie star, mobster, man about town. The question becomes which Mishima is "true," as opposed to an acted Mishima who is but one in a succession of Mishima characters created, selves given masks. The Mishima that I read is a character not unlike the characters found in his novels, a persona comprised of masks, of coverings and uncoverings of a self, of clothes, accessories, and adornments, participating in a striptease (not only as Barthes suggested it). The Mishima Yukio we know from the "real" life is constructed in many of the same ways that his characters were constructed.¹⁰⁰

Etō Jun considers Mishima's interaction with the *watakushishōsetsu* writers a stylistic one:

Mishima took up the mirror fashioned by the *watakushishōsetsu* writers to reflect *things* with fineness and precision and placed it in front of himself. . . .

The *watakushishōsetsu* writers tried to find self-liberation within solid *objects*

¹⁰⁰To say that the authorial Mishima is a self that can be read in ways similar to the characters in his novels is not necessarily to propose an "autobiographical" reading, looking for facts from the "real" life that appear in the "fictional" novels. I am more interested in looking at the process of creation, how these selves are put forward and constructed, and the postwar aura that imbues his work.

[reflected in that mirror]. Mishima attempted death by sinking down into *words* that had been made object. (106, emphasis original)

Etō's is one of the subtlest of critiques on this point, discussing Mishima's interaction with the *watakushishōsetsu* writers at both a philosophic and technical level. Both Mishima and the *watakushishōsetsu* writers are trying, in Etō's discussion, to grasp the physicality of things in order to make sense of life. Both are trying to dismiss the Other of the outside world by creating a severely limited space for narration. (That the *watakushishōsetsu* writers were self-absorbed and thus ineffectual is an old critique, argued most forcibly by Nakamura Mitsuo.) Etō's argument is enlightening for it highlights the dialectic between words and action that is crucial in Mishima and that will be discussed at more length below.

His argument is also important in this discussion for it identifies the philosophic desire integral in existentialism, the issue of materiality (and dissolution) in issues of character formation and issues of self. The *watakushishōsetsu* writers tried to do away with the problematic self, seeking dissolution and liberation in the physical objects that made up their everyday world. They failed; they could not lose themselves in these discreet objects, the hard matter of existence. Their anxiety then appears to resemble Roquentin's anxiety, living in a world where the materiality of existence pushes in on one. Mishima, says Etō, also tried to submerge himself in things, in objects, but his objects are fashioned from words. Or rather, he rendered words into objects, solid and material. The struggle is still with matter and with things, but the encounter is different for each and neither fully accounts for the impermeable materiality of things. For Sartre this is where the discussion begins; for Mishima it proved the ultimate site of his tragedy as he got focused on the objects while searching for an internal reality. The objects and the Other obstructed self-definition; they were the stumbling block that could not be overcome. Sartre would have it as the

point of departure, pushing off from solid objects one defines the self and appropriates to oneself consciousness via the role. As Etō describes it, in Mishima that initial materiality is found in words as object; I would add that it is also the body as material object to be overcome as well. The world of existence presents itself in the fullness of materiality. Mishima's body is another object. The body, often his own body, is another of those concrete objects in Mishima's world. Words as objects develop their meaning in relation to his body, the source of action and truth that words seem always to diminish and call into doubt. Getting past the materiality of the body is Mishima's first problem; it is also Sartre's.

I have drawn from Etō Jun's influential book on style, *Sakka wa kōdō suru*, in each chapter of this dissertation. Etō argues for a responsible style because writing is action, it is a positing, words are action, that action implies involvement and responsibility, it effects change. One is responsible for what one writes. This has clear resonances in Mishima and his interest in action. There is also something very existentialist about this concern for the writer's responsibility, that overlap occurs at the level of seeing and being seen as well, thus I think that Etō has hit on something when he quotes from Flaubert that, "Le style, c'est une maniere de voir" suggesting that this could be changed for Mishima to "Le style, c'est une maniere de se regarder." Style--which for Etō is action, the fulfillment of one's role, responsible activity--is not, for Mishima, simply a manner of seeing, but a manner of attracting the gaze of the Other. It is part of one's being. It is akin to the mask, it is another of the accessories, another of the accoutrements in constructing a role. It is part of the strategy for influencing the Look of the Other.

Kamen no kokuhaku conforms to enough of the genre expectations of *watakushishōsetsu* arguably be one (although I think it is not, ultimately, although a critic as astute as Katō Shūichi has emphatically stated, in a personal interview, that

Kamen no kokuhaku is indeed a *watakushishōsetsu*). This is true in large part because many of the events in the confession are biographically identifiable and overlap with Mishima's life.¹⁰¹ Mishima exploits the tradition by hinting at times that this work is, and at other times hinting that it is not, autobiographical and by further suggesting that it has been written with complete seriousness and integrity.

An autobiographical-style record written with sincerity is a core requisite for a *watakushishōsetsu*. As Miyoshi writes:

Mishima's is an even more daring gesture, as though the purpose of his "confession" were solely to mock the Japanese literary preoccupation with the personal I-novel. There is evidence here of a calculated aura of exposure meant to deflate the slightest suspicion of dishonesty; and there also appears to be a determination to "show the worst" so that possible charges against it of fictionality, deception, and hypocrisy may be dismissed once and for all. (147)

To dismiss fictionality, deception, and hypocrisy is to invoke the genre expectations of the *watakushishōsetsu*.¹⁰²

¹⁰¹To cite but one example from the many possible, Mitsuhana Takao prefaces his use of the novels as biographical source material by quoting Nakamura Mitsuo: "It is an unusual work indeed where the author shows this degree of imprudence when stuffing a novel with biographical elements, sticking them in places where they are not necessary." He uses this to support his claim that there is sufficient biographical material here to warrant a biographical reading whatever discomfort it causes Nakamura. I will not address here the issues raised by this practice, only note its prevalence (16).

¹⁰²"The *shishōsetsu*'s whole raison d'être rests on the powerful illusion of its textual transparency--its sincerity--which lets the reader view the author's experience

It seems that Mishima was not himself entirely decided on the issue for he hints at the autobiographical elements at the time of the novel's publication, while stressing that it is entirely a fiction and a fabrication, as we have seen above. In an essay near the end of his life, Mishima makes an almost off-handed comment to the effect that everyone knows that *Kamen no kokuhaku* is an autobiographical novel: "As those who have read my early work *Kamen no kokuhaku* know, from the time I was a weak youth" (*Bokushingu* 423) This identification of Mishima the author with the *Watakushi* of the novel strikes me as a curious admission, but an important one.

Nonetheless, to return to *Kamen no kokuhaku* and the discussion at hand, Sato Hideyuki outlines the issues of the novel (during a discussion from an entirely different perspective) and gives us the following synopsis of *watakushi*, the main character's, situation.

I imagine that "*watakushi*'s" existence is affirmed when he is recognized by the Other. However, since all the others [in the novel] mistakenly see *Watakushi* as "straight" (*seijō*) he knows that when he goes to take part in their activities he is not really known by these others. Now, if the others were aware of the split that *Watakushi* feels between the external self and the self he knows exists within him, the others would know his "true" existence, and with this he would be plunged into the frightening situation of having his self plundered by the other. (84-85)

In a different context, one could mistake this for a comment on a work by Sartre or a translation of Sartre. *Watakushi*'s existence is validated by the Look of the

'unmediated' by forms, shapes, structures, or other 'trappings' of fiction" (Fowler 27).

Other, yet he is caught in the quandary of being recognized for something he is not. At least, he fears that the Other sees him as something contrary to his view of himself. Because he does not exercise his freedom to act as he is, to make the Other recognize him for what he is, he has relinquished his freedom to the Other. He is, in short, in bad faith. He is in bad faith because he knows that he is much more attracted to young men than to young women, yet he plays at the role of heterosexual attraction. He is false to his “real” identity. He has allowed the Other to usurp his freedom. Now, in Sartrean terms, the only “real” identity is the one we act at being, the role we fulfill in everyday life. What we are is what the Other sees us as. With this, it seems to me, we have uncovered a fundamental conflict in Mishima’s fiction, particularly in these early novels. Mishima and his characters seem determined to uncover the “real” core of their being, of identity. They become tragic figures because there is no real core to be discovered; much as they try, they cannot discover it. Neither are they able to accept that the void behind the mask is the reality.¹⁰³ They are poignantly aware of the Other’s image of them and they are equally pained by the belief that it is not who

¹⁰³Because I read Mishima and his work this way, it seems to me that Roy Starrs begins his book on the wrong tack by asking “Who was the ‘real’ Mishima, the man behind the masks? Or, in literary terms, what was the real world view underlying his novels? The question is best answered, of course, by reading the novel’s themselves.” He goes on to state that “Mishima’s real ‘act of courage’ . . . [was] the devastating honesty with which, in his writings, he unmasked his fictional *alter egos* and revealed the void which gaped behind the mask” (7). I am not convinced by Starrs’ subsequent reading, nor by Mishima’s texts themselves, that the masks are ever uncovered. I am arguing precisely the opposite, that there is nothing but mask and role however much Mishima and his characters might wish otherwise.

they “really” are. *Watakushi* remains convinced that his “real” identity is not known. He fears what would be thought of him if it were known. The Other sees him as heterosexual while he knows himself to be homosexual. In the Sartrean understanding, the Other has won here; he is homosexual by virtue of relinquishing his freedom to be anything else. To be homosexual he would need to act that way, be seen by the Other that way. Again, “I recognize that I am as the Other sees me.”

The issue becomes how to present oneself so that what the Other sees conforms to one’s own self-image. *Watakushi* participates in a self-deception in performing a false role, in donning a mask that prevents the Other from knowing him as he is. The Other sees what is presented--there can be no other way, for it is the *only* way that the Other can get an image of him. If the self presented is not the self I take myself to be, I am in bad faith and have allowed the Other to usurp my freedom. The only way for *Watakushi* to regain his freedom is to act according to what he visualizes himself to be. To make the internal “true” self visible he must act it out for validation by the Other’s gaze. The tragedy for the Mishima character, as I will take up subsequently, is in attempting to make this “real” core visible by other means.

By donning a mask (or pretending to don a mask) Mishima sets up an opposition with himself as character and as author at a more primary level. Not only has his book become Other, he has become his own Other. “Mishima, by putting on this mask, constructs an Other within himself” (Muramatsu *Mishima Yukio no Sekai* 149). We can speak of “Mishima” at this stage, conflating him with his characters, because of his own intentional ambiguities. That is, we are invited to read him as one of his characters because of the clues he provided, textually by invoking the *watakushishosetsu* tradition and extra-textually by his own comments on his work. Mishima actively obscures this line. Hanada Kiyoteru echoes the line of thought that Muramatsu hints at in this regard: “The mask [which he has put on] always looks on

his own interior. . . . The mask has become a tool for completing his body” (“Mishima Yukio” 32-33). That is, these masks and the roles presented to the viewing Other are integral elements in the development of the character.

From the very beginning--the birth of the work, the birth of the self--the “I” is confused (the title allowing a convenient “Oh, that’s simply a different mask speaking” as explanation) and veracity, the crystal facts that these memories are to prove about the self, begin to spin out of control. Narration skips like an old record. The I who is relating his own memories is soon describing family memories, histories of a time preceding his own birth. The I is now telling, seemingly unaware, memories that could not be his own, that could only be another telling, and these retellings are a reconstructing of his self. Another skip, and the infant is being described in the third person. Who is telling whom about whom?

This self, this I, is ostensibly telling us his own story. But by relating events that are memories, memories that may or may not be his own, these events become nothing more than images retold, at what remove no one can now know. They become reconstructions that make up this life, this self. The reconstructions are part of the costume, they supplement the role. One becomes an object if one has no control of one’s own image. To be seen, and to be fixed, passively, by the gaze of the Other is to forfeit one’s freedom. Writing, the telling of stories, is akin to performing a role in order to determine how the Other sees one.

Watakushi tells stories in order to widen the audience, to form the Other, the observer, the sole entity which can verify the self. The “I” will only exist if the Other confers that existence upon it. *Watakushi* cannot know if he exists as he imagines until the feedback from the Other corresponds and confirms that existence. The telling and retelling is an appeal: Please tell me that I exist as I think I do, that I am what I

think I am. *Watakushi* writes a confession so that we will see the “real” of his personality, see who he really is.

The self, believing that it has an original "real" core, fears that it could melt away and be absorbed by a pre-formed ideal. He fears being turned into an object. This self fears the ready-made mold that is inherent by Sartrean definition in the objectifying look of the Other, for this means the loss of all freedom to determine his own self. For example, as *Watakushi* goes on to tell us:

My memory runs head-on into a scene that is like a symbol of those years. To me as I am today, that scene represents childhood itself, past and irrecoverable. When I saw the scene I felt the hand of farewell take its leave of me. I had a premonition at that instant that all my feeling of subjective time, or timelessness, might one day gush forth from within me and flood into the mold of that scene, to become an exact imitation of its people and movements and sounds; that simultaneous with the completion of this copy, the original might melt away into the distant perspectives of real and objective time; and that I might be left with nothing more than the mere imitation or, to say it another way, with nothing more than an accurately stuffed specimen of my childhood. (28-29)¹⁰⁴

A stuffed specimen would be frightening because this self wants to grasp the "real" object. The control of time gives him the feeling of control of his self; the fear is that time will “gush forth” to flow into the mold presented by the Other. The loss of subjective time would be the loss of the self and his hold on the flow of reality. That mold is nothing less than the image by which the Other attempts to fix the Self, attempts to construct the Self, solidify its existence, steal its freedom. This self wants

¹⁰⁴Unless noted otherwise, all quotations are from the translation by Meredith Weatherby.

the mask that confesses to be real, but the fear is of a mask, a specimen, that is surface only with nothing but blackness inside. That blackness gnaws at the self and causes it to tell stories and to write.

The "scene" in the passage above refers to the parade of firemen carrying an *o-mikoshi* on their backs as they parade before *watakushi*'s house. The *o-mikoshi* is the temporary residence of a spirit-god. If anything has substance, it should be the god enshrined here. But like a specimen, like a mask, there is nothing but nothing: "Within the thick scarlet-and-white ropes, within the guardrails of black lacquer and gold, behind those fast-shut doors of gold leaf, there was a four-foot cube of pitch-blackness" (31). "This perfect cube of empty night" offers an image of what this self fears most: a reality that is a veneer behind which nothing exists. To fight off this horror the self tells stories, produces memories, and pretends. This black space is Mishima's Nihilism. It is the dread of a mask that covers nothing but an emptiness, a mask that is the self entire, not simply the covering of a self.

These scenes set a stage. I quote from Sartre again because of the relevance to this discussion:

If we happen to appear "in public" to act in a play or to give a lecture, we never lose sight of the fact that we are looked at, and we execute the ensemble of acts which we have come to perform *in the presence of* the look; better yet we attempt to constitute a being and an ensemble of objects *for* this look. (*Being and Nothingness* 281)

Likewise, near the beginning of this novel the young masked *watakushi* reports that "Everyone says that life is a stage" before launching into more memories. But first he says:

Most people do not seem to become possessed with the idea [of the stage], at any rate not as early as I did. By the end of childhood I was already firmly

convinced that it was so and that I was to play my part on the stage without ever once revealing my true self. Since my conviction was accompanied by an extremely naive lack of experience, even though there was a lingering suspicion somewhere in my mind that I might be mistaken, I was still practically certain that all men embarked on life in just this way. I believed optimistically that once the performance was finished the curtain would fall and the audience would never see the actor without his make-up. (101)

This actor finds there is no offstage. He can never stop performed in his role. His hope was, his desire was, that the audience/Other would never see him without his makeup. If makeup and mask determine the self, then to be seen "without" them is to cease to exist. Whether it is actually possible to be seen without a mask becomes another issue, it is the fear of being seen without it that reinforces its necessity and the fear that drives all of *watakushi's* further activity.

The next memory carries us along in this line of development: in class the poor student can either show he doesn't get it and "go to the dogs," or he can "bluff his way through," which is to say he can act as though he understands. It is another crisis of the individual condemned to (the freedom to) choose how he will act. Which is to say this self is a student who doesn't understand, in the mode of one who does. The fact is, it appears to everyone else that he is following the lesson, therefore he is. No matter how much he insists that he is dull and lazy, his actions--as seen by the Other--show otherwise, and therefore prove otherwise. He is as he is seen by the Other.

It is a process repeated over and over in this "confession". The next memory is an account of this avowed homosexual being accepted by all as heterosexual. Seen as such he can be nothing else, this is what he is unless he acts differently and changes perceptions. But this is indeed difficult: once a role and personality is chosen, or

more accurately chosen for one, it is a merry-go-round that proves hard to stop. There is no offstage and no hope of respite: the Other is always there and the role must be kept up. This is why "Hell is--other people" (Sartre, *No Exit* 45). The looking never ends, one can not let down the mask. Again, as Mishima phrased it, "It is only the mask that has eaten into the flesh, that is stuck right onto the flesh, that can make a confession" ("*Kamen no kokuhaku nōto*" 258).

"The period of childhood is a stage" states this young self obsessed with images and roles played out before spectators. His memories are full of meticulously recounted details of clothes and costumes. There is the memory of the magician Shokyokusai Tenkatsu who "lounged indolently about the stage, her opulent body veiled in garments like those of the Great Harlot of the Apocalypse. On her arms were flashy bracelets . . . her make-up was as heavy as that of a female ballad-singer" and on it goes, relating details of this woman, of her costumes and masks that made her who she was, the costumes and masks of a performer (18).

This child is enraptured with these entrapments. "From among my mother's kimonos I dragged out the most gorgeous one, the one with the strongest colors." In this costume he runs in front of the adults impersonating Tenkatsu, only to disappear: "Not a single person was visible to my eyes. My frenzy was focused upon the consciousness that, through my impersonation, Tenkatsu was being revealed to many eyes. In short, I could see nothing but myself" (18). Only the self, acting, is visible, and that self is only conscious of presenting Tenkatsu to all the others; in this Tenkatsu was being revealed. It is the desire to be something, to be seen as something, to be accepted by the Other in the role that one wants to cast for oneself. This is the basic struggle: to exercise one's own freedom by influencing the Other's perception of one before that Other casts the Self into its own preconceived idea. In this struggle the look remains everything: "And then I chanced to catch sight of my mother's face.

She had turned slightly pale and was simply sitting there as though absent-minded. Our glances met; she lowered her eyes. . . . I understood. . . . The maid grabbed me . . . [and] had me stripped of my outrageous masquerade" (19). He understood that it wasn't working. That his chosen role wasn't being accepted, that he wasn't being seen as he had intended to be seen. He goes on to tell us what she thought, although it is obviously only his own anxieties about himself since there is no way possible for him to actually know what she thought. He is determined by what the Other (here his mother, who is also metonymic for society) sees, which is no more than what he thinks the Other is seeing. In this context Hosea Hirata comments on the Tenkatsu scene:

He saw himself alone only when he put on the exteriors of an other and placed the spectacle under the others' gazes. The interior never comes into being unless it is dragged out to the surface by a desire to become the other (exteriority) and is made visible to others' eyes. ("To Slit the Beautiful Body" 88)

Hosea Hirata continues in his explication of this passage, correctly I think, that "The passage clearly indicates again that his '*honshitsu*' (essence) is located in the sphere of '*engi*' (play-acting), or in other words, in what he is not, in what he desires to be (for example Tenkatsu), or in the mask" ("To Slit the Beautiful Body" 89). Hirata locates the "reality" in the acted role, in accordance with the Sartrean paradigm. The actions of characters clearly reveals that they understand the paradigm of reality of self that is located in the acting and in the recognition by the Other. Nonetheless, these characters are continually attempting to somehow show that Other a "true" internal and intangible self. In Oe's early work we encountered individuals who were known by the physical, whose guts were shown to all and seen by the Other. The Mishima character is driven by a paradox: the desire to have that internal visceral body be known by the body, but focusing on a mask that has eaten right into that skin.

Hirata's overlap is of course apt, especially if we read the historical Mishima Yukio as one of the Mishima characters whose ultimate end coincides with the viscera of the body (text) being slit open and revealed to all.

Kinkakuji

Kinkakuji (The Temple of the Golden Pavilion) does not invite us to align the main character with the authorial self as closely as does *Kamen no kokuhaku*. However, Mizoguchi, the main character of *Kinkakuji* struggles to construct himself against the Other in ways that parallel those we have seen, but with one very interesting difference. The self of *Kamen no kokuhaku* is preoccupied with roles and especially the trappings of roles: costumes, vestments, masks, and make-up. Mizoguchi of *Kinkakuji* is also obsessed with appearances, but more than acting, the focus is on roles as represented in words. If for no other reason, this is because this monk is a stutterer; words and expressions present serious problems for him. Utterances must be worked at and developed, making himself understood can never be taken for granted. His very name carries this allusion, being comprised of the characters for ditch--the sort of drainage ditch that runs along a road--and mouth: he is "ditch-mouth," the mouth from which ditch water flows, perhaps. This all underscores the difficulty in presentation and communication.

Mizoguchi is also an acolyte monk. His religious training keeps him separate from the world, as does his inability to speak effortlessly. Mizoguchi also carries within him an idealized Golden Temple while he lives in the "real" temple. The temple he carries within himself represents idealized beauty and in the reflection of this idealized beauty he sees and defines himself and all else. This idealized temple as idealized beauty is for Mizoguchi the Other against which he defines himself. The

conflict between the "real" temple and the idealized temple sets up one of the pendulum motions that keeps this novel in motion. It is the temple he loves and hates, a pendulum swinging between fascination and repulsion. Its beauty and permanence provide a point of reference for him, yet the very perfection and immutability that makes the temple a reference point threatens to overwhelm and crush him in its perfection. Swinging in tandem with this pendulum are conflicts between inner and outer, between the silent and the speaking world, between the quiet life of the monk in the temple compound and the distracting, noisy world outside its walls, and between the Self and its defining Other(s).

Mizoguchi struggles first against his stuttering which restricts his contact with the outside world:

My stuttering, I hardly need to say, placed an obstacle between me and the outside world. It is the first sound I have trouble in uttering. This first sound is like a key to the door that separates my inner world from the world outside, and I have never known that key to turn smoothly in its lock. Most people, thanks to their easy command of words, can keep this door between the inner world and the outer world wide open, so that the air passes freely between the two; but for me that has been quite impossible. (5)¹⁰⁵

Mizoguchi is constantly trying to capture the "real." "There are times the reality of the outer world seems to have been waiting for me." In the same way, in these first few pages, the "real" Golden Pavilion of pictures and books exists in contrast to the "Temple as father had described it to me" (4). This is nothing other than more difficulty with words, the conflict between a temple described from a distance and the object that these words describe, between the temple as couched in

¹⁰⁵Unless noted otherwise all quotations are from the translation of Ivan Morris.

words and the temple where he now lives, an object he can reach out and touch. Or again, this described object which acquired its own mythology and power and threatened to crush him, not unlike a deity, is now the place where he resides. The self and the represented self is also this split between inner and outer that is, like everything, split into dialectical opposites, self and other, real and represented. Mizoguchi's mistake is to place his trust in the external, in the reality determined by the other.

The temple as received in descriptions from his father and which was derived from pictures in books developed an aura as a supreme and perfect being, and all else dwells in its shadow and draws its meaning in relation to it. He now lives in this place, in this being, and sacred and mundane occupy the same space. The confusion that this introduces by blurring barriers fills him with angst, his final destructive act is a bid to free himself from this pressure.

The Other oppresses. The temple has become for Mizoguchi a source of identity and judging Other. The temple becomes an angry deity demanding, in its perfection, perfection from its subjects. "Others are all witnesses. If there were no others, shame would not come into the world" (*Zenshū* 10: 19 my translation). Without witnesses there would be no shame; likewise of course, without witnesses there would be no Self. "I had been under the strange illusion that to disregard my stuttering was of itself equivalent to annihilating that existence called 'me'" (44). If there were no Other to say "he is a stutterer" than that existence would fade away, may never have existed. This existence as stutterer is a role cast upon him by the Other and he has accepted this judgment. Fixed by the Other's gaze as stutterer, he now conforms himself to that image, constructs himself according to their image. The Other has succeeded in taking his freedom to change, to construct himself.

Mizoguchi's struggle in *The Temple of the Golden Pavilion* is to develop a sense of individuality against the beauty of the Temple. Beauty, embodied in the supremely beautiful Golden Temple--beautiful in fact as well as an ideal--is so strong, so close, that it overshadows and threatens to extinguish him. He can never be complete in the shadow of the main pavilion. Hence his resolve to destroy it: if he destroys what overshadows him, he will be free to live. In his visit to the Japan Sea he finds, "Here I could be self-sufficient. Here I was not threatened by anything." And it is here that he decides, "I must set fire to the Golden Temple" (191) This is a more traditional existentialist landscape, where the solitary protagonist must destroy the constructs around him to be free. Mizoguchi destroys limiting society by burning the temple.

His clubfooted friend, Kashiwagi, has a similar sentiment: "You see, I was possessed by the fear that if my clubfooted condition was overlooked or ignored, I would in a sense cease to exist" (95). The Other casts the fixating look--"stutterer", "clubfoot"--this becomes their identity, their selves. In this regard, "Cripples and lovely women are both tired of being looked at, they are weary of an existence that involves constantly being observed, they feel hemmed in; and they return the gaze by means of that very existence itself. The one who looks is the one who wins (92)." This is precisely as Sartre would have it, where all exchanges involve the Look in a battle for determinacy.

The idealized Temple, or idealized beauty in the form of the Temple, is the Other that Mizoguchi constantly grapples with. It is another Other against which Mizoguchi fights and defines himself. This judging Other threatens to crush him.

The bond between the Golden Temple and myself has been cut, I thought. Now my vision that the Golden Temple and I were living in the same world has broken down. Now I shall return to my previous condition, but it will be even

more hopeless than before. A condition in which I exist on one side and beauty on the other. A condition that will never improve as long as this world endures.
(64)

It is the temple as a boundary (a defining line) and reference point.

Mizoguchi, like the narrating self of *Kamen no kokuhaku*, is trying to define himself, trying to be, himself. He can only do so through the intermediation of the Other. In Mizoguchi's case, this Other is first the Golden Temple, and then numerous friends and their dialogues. There are those sightseers who come and see him as priest, expecting only what conforms to their image. There are also parents:

Please remember that years later, when Father's coffin was being carried out of the house, I was so busy *looking* at the dead face, that I did not shed a single tear. Please remember that with his death I was freed from the fetters of his hands, that by looking intently at his face, I was able to confirm my own existence. (56, italics original)

What Mizoguchi here accomplishes with his Look is the very essence of the Gaze: he fixes his father/Other with that Gaze, makes him into the thing he would have him to be, and thereby is able to confirm his own existence. He has stolen his father's freedom; now dead, that father no longer controls him. He confirms that the corpse is object only (an exploration of being and object that we have seen Oe also explore). The goal of the look is to freeze another with the look, thereby giving the power of determination to the Self. The Self attempts to make an object, a thing, of the Other; in essence, to kill the Other. Mizoguchi's father is now dead, literally an object, and the freedom Mizoguchi derives from this fact is the same freedom derived from the fixating look. His father has been made into an object, he no longer controls Mizoguchi. Up until this point his father has wielded power over him, has tried to steal his freedom with the fixating look. Mizoguchi now steals it back.

This is only one battle won, for the other friends around him still wield this power, are the foil against which he is determined. His friend Tsurukawa for instance, is such a foil: "I must have said it again and again: Tsurukawa was my positive picture" (83). Tsurukawa is also an Other against whom he struggles.

Likewise his clubfooted friend Kashiwagi, who, like Mizoguchi, was convinced that if his deformity were overlooked he would cease to exist. "People probably think they can't see themselves unless they have a mirror. But to be a cripple is to have a mirror constantly under one's nose. Every hour of the day my entire body was reflected in that mirror (99)." That mirror can be nothing other than the Other of onlookers, those who look and say "he has a clubfoot," thereby foisting that existence upon him. There is no escaping that role. Resignation perhaps, but he goes on to claim, "it did not bother me. To have a pair of clubfeet--such was the condition of life for me, such was its reason, its aim, its ideal, such was life itself" (100). This leads him to the conclusion "that the problem lay not in trying to shorten the distance between myself and the object, but in maintaining the distance so that the object might remain an object" (102). That is, he is trying to fix the Other in a role, turn it into an immovable thing, an object, in the same way that the Other attempts to affix him as a cripple or as a clubfoot. This is Sartre's dance: he who looks first wins. He who can determine the Other holds the power and preserves his own freedom to act.

In the end Mizoguchi moves to destroy this Temple, an Other that has welled up and threatened to crush him. It is a bid to be free, to stare down this Other and make it disappear. He runs inside the temple with the tools he needs to burn it to the ground and encounters the little wooden statue of Ashikaga Yoshimitsu sitting in the dark, looking at him.

Yoshimitsu's eyes, I thought as I bounded out of the door and ran back to the rear of the library. Those eyes of Yoshimitsu's. Everything would be

performed in front of those eyes. In front of those unseeing eyes of a dead witness. (250)

He is almost prevented from setting the temple afire by what has become the crux of action in these works: the act of looking. He stops: "I am seen, and I am seen in this role" is clearly what goes through his mind. Eyes and a witness are needed to validate existence; in the same way a witness is needed to validate Mizoguchi's bid for freedom, his act of self-definition. The witnessing Other is the small statue of a Shogun in a priestly role, the Shogun who commissioned this temple to be built. The eyes that look are not real. Perhaps therefore the act will not be real. Yet the unseeing eyes of a dead witness wield all the power of the seeing eyes of a live witness and threaten to make him conform to his role as obedient monk.

This does not stop him of course, and in the end he burns down the temple. In the end, at least for a moment, he has won in this battle of wills with the Other, burning down one and staring down the others. From high atop a nearby hill he looks down on the scene, smokes a cigarette, and murmurs to himself "I want to live." There is freedom, he can continue.

Action (acting, the act) is an important concept throughout Mishima's *oeuvre*. Without attempting to exhaust its implications here, we can say, in general terms, that action is a bid for self-determination, for freedom from the stifling stare of the Other, by attempting to influence how that Other perceives me. Mizoguchi has succeeded because he has acted, but this conflict of looks, even of looks exchanged with the glass eyes of a carved figure, underlies the basic pattern and struggle. It is the struggle of a Self against an Other which threatens to crush and destroy, to solidify the Self into a preconceived role, to steal that self's freedom of self-determination. It is a struggle and desire motivates all the Mishima characters.

A Conclusion

In the end, we find, an existentialist sensibility in Mishima that is as strong as that we found in Noma or Ōe. The curious fact about Mishima's work is that there is no apparent conscious interaction with the sort of existentialist issues that one expects from the author of works exhibiting these themes. Noma's overlap with the issues made popular by Sartre was more than passing. His work is interesting in a historical sense for the degree to which it articulates Sartrean considerations and conceptions in the years before a Japanese could have read them. His work reveals an independent appearance of fictional concern arising from similar war and wartime issues. Ōe's is existentialist for many of these same reasons, but all of Sartre's work, the philosophy and the fiction was now available. His fiction is existentialist and he had the advantage of access to Sartre's work, of reading that work and interacting with it via his own fiction. Mishima's work exhibits the insistence that the existentialist sensibility exerted on the postwar literary consciousness by virtue of the degree to which those themes are evidenced in his work, even while he professed no interest in those very ideas. It is the insistence with which this discourse on existentialism--concerns for the physical carnal body and for the Self and Other--asserts its place in the fiction of postwar Japan that motivated this study. At the end I trust I have elucidated the appearance of those themes, as well as made use of them to elucidate the fiction, showing how an awareness of this discourse enriches our readings of that fiction.

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